REVISED AND UPDATED

THE SHAPING OF THINGS TO COME

Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church

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To my students at Morling Seminary,
who help me trial all these ideas before they ever get to print.

—MF

To my various comrades at missional.com
(a newly formed collaborative network comprising of ForgeAmerica,
Exponential, Future Travelers, Missio, New Thing Network,
GCM, Entermission). You are the shaping things to now.

And especially to Debs, who has always
inspired me for the journey.

—AH

A church which pitches its tents without constantly looking out for new horizons, which does not continually strike camp, is being untrue to its calling. . . . [We must] play down our longing for certainty, accept what is risky, live by improvisation and experiment.

—Hans Küng

Contents

You Must Read This Bit First

The first edition of *The Shaping of Things to Come* was published in 2003, although we had begun what turned out to be the lengthy and laborious process of writing it several years before that. It has also been subsequently translated into German and Korean, and has been read across the globe. Given this exposure, and that it was penned over a decade ago, we are regularly asked whether we still agree with what we wrote then, and if there's anything we'd change if we could write it over. Our answer is invariably the same: we still totally stand by the central tenets of this book, but there are three changes we'd make if we were rewriting it:

1. update the anecdotes and snapshots of missional projects outlined in the original edition;
2. soften the polemical edge of the early section that appears to dismiss all traditional approaches as inherently non-missional; and
3. be less pessimistic about inviting the leaders of established churches to incorporate missional principles into their churches.

On the first point, the need to update our illustrations should be evident. More than ten years after our search for missional experiments took us across the US and the UK back in the early 2000s, we can now report that the missional paradigm is being widely discussed and indeed accepted by church planters around the world. There are many more fresh stories to tell, and with the help of our colleague and friend, Lance Ford, we have now included them throughout this edition.

The second and third points are related. We acknowledge that we were rather too quick in dismissing existing traditional churches and their leaders

from being able to re-missionalize what they were doing. Part of the reason for this is that we wrote the book primarily for church planters and missionaries in the West—a group of people who needed material that took us beyond contemporary church growth approaches to being genuine cross-cultural missionaries in our context. It was built on the curriculum we had developed for Forge Mission Training Network. There was no such text available at the time. All we had was the Church Planter's Toolkit, a resource that was great for people in non-missional environments, but no longer worked for those of us who found ourselves isolated from mainstream Western culture. We never thought that the book would be read by established church leaders. None were more surprised than us when it became something of a defining text for the missional church movement as a whole.

As a result, the tone of the first edition can be read as being somewhat dismissive (some might say, obnoxiously so) of prevailing forms of church. Consequently we do think it is appropriate to soften the stridency without underplaying the intended revolutionary invitation originally sounded by *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

Indeed, we suspect the book garnered the readership it did partly because we were so raucous in our call to the church to embrace wholesale change. We laid all our cards on the table and called it as we saw it. Many people didn't like that, but it did keep them reading. Maybe our original tone was shockingly appropriate back in 2003, but a decade later we think a less strident, but no less radical, call is more in keeping with our times.

We are also seeing encouraging shifts within existing churches toward a greater embracing of the missional paradigm. In 2003 we confessed our belief that the planting of new, culturally diverse missional communities was the best way forward for the church, acknowledging that the challenging missional context in the West required us to adopt a fully incarnational stance, a stance we openly doubted most established churches could embrace. We had seen some churches become revitalized, but felt that such success was so rare that the greater hope lay in a missional church planting movement. Today, we certainly don't back off from our hope for such church planting movements to emerge, but we are rather more optimistic about missional revitalization within the established church.

In fact, Alan in particular has been working with large churches across the US in the Future Travelers project, exploring principles for the adoption of a missional stance in large established churches. These principles were detailed in his book with Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge* (Zondervan, 2011). The signs are much more promising than we would ever have anticipated in 2003.

Nonetheless, we are hopeful that this second edition of *The Shaping of Things to Come* can remain the incendiary shot across the bow of the church that it was ten years ago. In our introduction to the first edition we wrote,

> In this book expect to encounter revolutionary ideas that will sometimes unnerve you. We hope to reawaken the latent apostolic imagination at the heart of the biblical faith and to exhort God's people to courageous missional engagement for our time—living out the gospel *within* its cultural context rather than perpetuating an institutional commitment *apart from* its cultural context. In writing this book we are advocating a wholesale change in the way Christians are *doing* and *being* the church, and because of this ours is not necessarily a popular message.

We don't wish to soft-sell that unpopular message today and have been careful not to tamper with the rousing tone and clarion call it contains. We trust this second edition will be as combustible as was its original incarnation.

PART ONE

THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

1

Evolution or Revolution?

> There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more difficult to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who would profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new.
>
> —Machiavelli

A Bad Day in Black Rock?

Something's up in the Nevada desert outside Reno. A movement is gathering force and it is not leaving its participants untouched. Its influence is now stretching across the US. On the playa, the four-hundred-square-mile, flat-floored basin known by artists and musicians around the world as Black Rock Desert, the annual pilgrimage to Burning Man builds to a crescendo. Burning Man is perhaps the ultimate postmodern festival. Each year thousands of artists, musicians, bohemians, punks, taggers, rappers, and other artistes or simply interested bystanders journey into the 107-degree heat of the desert for a festival like no other. It is a temporary community of people committed to generosity, environmentalism, celebration, spirituality, and above all, art. Burning Man has been so successful over the past twenty or so years that it has come to represent those trends that pose the greatest challenges to the Christian church. It dares to offer acceptance, community, an experience of god, redemption, and

atonement. In short, it resembles everything the church is supposed to offer. But many people are finding the transformative power of Burning Man to be far and away more effective than anything they experience in church.

Although Christians might be tempted to focus on and condemn Burning Man's patently pagan elements—the near-deification of art, nature, and the individual, not to mention the quasi-sacred rite in which both a human effigy and "confessional cards" are burned—we should rather examine what takes place at Burning Man in order to learn why thousands of people flock to the event every year. It is actually quite easy to denigrate Burning Man as a counterfeit religious experience, but Christians who content themselves with this will never understand what exactly draws participants to live under the Man's watchful gaze in Black Rock Desert. They will never discover what people today are searching for and thus will never offer the authentic spiritual experience that people crave.

Eager to understand this experience and the cravings behind it, Alan and his wife Debra journeyed to the desert themselves recently. Along with members of their church, The Tribe of LA, they entered fully into the Burning Man experience for its own sake, but also as a kind of exercise in anthropological research. What drew people to Burning Man? What longings were met on the floor of the Black Rock Desert? What they found confirmed what participants have previously told us. According to participants at this postmodern festival, six key elements make up the Burning Man experience.

Belonging: Says the official Burning Man website,

> You belong here and you participate. You're not the weirdest kid in the classroom—there's always somebody there who's thought up something you never even considered. You're there to breathe art. Imagine an ice sculpture emitting glacial music—in the desert. Imagine the Man, greeting you, neon and benevolence, watching over the community. You're here to build a community that needs you and relies on you.[1]

In a society that has been fractured by economic rationalism, globalization, racial disunity, ideological differences, fear, and violence, the Burning Man community claims to offer solace, welcome, and acceptance.

Survival: Burning Man is not for the fainthearted. It involves venturing into the desert and surviving without restaurants, air conditioning, or shopping

1. This and all subsequent quotations about Burning Man are from Molly Steenson, "What Is Burning Man?" http://burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/ experience.html.

malls. Why is this important? With all the comforts of home stripped away, participants have no choice but to look deep within themselves, to discover who they truly are, and to summon up from within themselves the will and the power to survive—both in the desert and after they return to the world outside.

Empowerment: Again, to the website:

> You're here to create. Since nobody at Burning Man is a spectator, you're here to build your own new world. You've built an egg for shelter, a suit made of light sticks, a car that looks like a shark's fin. You've covered yourself in silver, you're wearing a straw hat and a string of pearls, or maybe a skirt for the first time.

Some artists create massive, highly sophisticated art installations. Others develop smaller works. Some people simply paint their naked bodies or their cars. Others, who have come expecting merely to spectate, are cajoled into expressing themselves creatively throughout the week. No one is deemed to be without talent.

Sensuality: Burning Man is a highly sensual, experiential community.

> You're here to experience. Ride your bike in the expanse of nothingness with your eyes closed. Meet the theme camp—enjoy Irrational Geographic, relax at Bianca's Smut Shack and eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Find your love and understand each other as you walk slowly under a parasol. Wander under the veils of dust at night on the playa.

Celebration: The crescendo of the festival is the burning of the large human effigy in the middle of the camp. Participants have told us that as the Burning Man goes up in flames, they experience a deeply spiritual sensation. As the founder of Burning Man, Larry Harvey says,

> As the procession starts, the circle forms, and the man ignites, you experience something personal, something new to yourself, something you've never felt before. It's an epiphany, it's primal, it's newborn. And it's completely individual.

Artists cast their art works into the flames. There is apparently a purging, a form of atonement, and a sense of liberation and joy.

Liminality: The word *liminal* from the Latin *limen* (threshold) signifies an in-between time. Often used by anthropologists to describe the period between childhood and adulthood, it refers to the transitional, temporary period of

human transformation. The Burning Man community appears in August and takes over the seemingly untouched playa, then leaves in September, removing any trace that it was ever there. First-timers are instructed,

> You'll leave as you came. When you depart from Burning Man, you leave no trace. Everything you built, you dismantle. The waste you make and the objects you consume leave with you. Volunteers will stay for weeks to return the Black Rock Desert to its pristine condition. But you'll take the world you built with you. When you drive back down the dusty roads toward home, you slowly reintegrate to the world you came from. You feel in tune with the other dust-covered vehicles that shared the same community. Over time, vivid images still dance in your brain, floating back to you when the weather changes. The Burning Man community, whether your friends, your new acquaintances, or the Burning Man project, embraces you. At the end, though your journeys to and from Burning Man are finished, you embark on a different journey—forever.

We open this book with our impressions of the Burning Man phenomenon because it and festivals like it around the world seem to be saying something important to the world in general and to the church specifically. Burning Man is not just a bad day in Black Rock (to quote a great movie title). It's a cry from an emerging postmodern generation for a community of belonging, spirituality, sensuality, empowerment, and liberation. And yet, once you've been to the Nevada desert and tasted something as overwhelming as Burning Man, what does the contemporary traditional church have to offer you? We, the authors, take the view that the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is greater than anything offered at Black Rock. But we are realistic enough to admit that unless the church recovers its role as a subversive, missionary movement, no one who has been to Burning Man will be the least bit interested in it. We are both missionaries to the core. And like all missionaries we cannot stand by and watch the contemporary church become a pale, anemic version of its former self. What is required to reach the Burning Man generation is nothing less than a complete paradigm shift for the Western church.

The same people who first told us about Burning Man also spoke with gusto about their favorite film, *Fight Club,* starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton. In that film a subversive community of young men begins to gather around the charismatic figure Tyler Durden (played by both Pitt and Norton—if you haven't seen the film, don't ask). Under his manic leadership the club members meet to fight each other and to inflict random acts of seditious violence on society. Theirs is a community of male empowerment with a strongly anticonsumerist sentiment. Like the Burning Man festival, it is also about belonging, liberation, rebellion, and the rejection of middle-class American values. There is

an untamed energy about Durden's fight club. It has a dissident wildness about it, and we know many young men who have been deeply affected by the film.

It might seem unsavory to many Christian people to be asked to learn something about the need for an emerging missional church by exploring Burning Man or *Fight Club*. But we are convinced that both are prime examples of the desperate yearning that has been unleashed in the Western world over the past few decades. During that time, the advent of postmodernism has raised within the West many expectations for an experiential, activist form of religious, mystical experience. The Christian church has not met these expectations, though it could be argued that for a brief time some forms of Pentecostalism came closer than the rest of the church. The contemporary traditional church is increasingly seen as the least likely option for those seeking an artistic, politically subversive, activist community of mystical faith. The church can no longer write the emerging Burning Man generation off as a small subculture. While the activities at Burning Man might not be everybody's cup of tea, the yearnings it seeks to meet are much more common than the church gives credence to. D. H. Lawrence said as long ago as 1924, "The adventure has gone out of the Christian venture." He then proposed that humankind create a new venture toward hope. His aspirations are still being played out to this day.

Evolution or Revolution?

We've become increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it's in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally reforming its structures. What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach. Therefore, it is our intention to tell stories about the local heroes we've encountered on our travels around the world. Because we do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach to church planting and church growth, the various models we'll discuss are presented not as a panacea, not as *the* recommended way forward for the church, but as examples of what certain missionaries have done in their quests to reach Melbourne, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Glasgow, and many other cities in the Western context with the gospel. We will present a number of principles and suggestions for church leaders wanting to morph into what is now openly being called the missional church. The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) says, "The missional church represents God in the encounter between God and human culture. It exists not because of human goals or desires, but as a result of God's creating and saving work in the world. It is a visible manifestation of

how the Good News of Jesus Christ is present in human life and transforms human culture to reflect more faithfully God's intentions for creation. It is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God's activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world."[2]

In case this sounds like the mandate for just about every church (whether consciously "missional" or not), GOCN furthers its definition by stating that a missional church "seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members." In other words, such a church makes its mission its priority and perpetually asks itself, "*What has God called us to be and do in our current cultural context?*" The issue of cultural context is essential because the missional church shapes itself to fit that context in order to transform it for the sake of the kingdom of God. By definition, the missional church is always outward looking, always changing (as culture continues to change), and always faithful to the Word of God. In many places it is so radical it barely resembles church as we know it. In other cases it might appear conventional but is in fact incarnating itself into its community in surprising and exciting ways. Above all, we're convinced that what will ultimately be required is Christian leadership that values imagination, creativity, innovation, and daring.

Albert Einstein, one of history's greatest thinkers, once noted that "the kind of thinking that will solve the world's problems will be of a different order to the kind of thinking that created those problems in the first place." This was no mere wordplay for Einstein. It was the defining motif in his life as a paradigm shifter. His ability to think with radical originality precipitated no less than two, and some argue three, major paradigm shifts in our understanding of physics and of the cosmos, and in so doing changed the course of history and shaped the thinking of generations. We are proposing that a similar paradigm-busting imagination is needed for the emergence of the missional church of the twenty-first century in the West.

If Einstein was right, then the problems of the church, like all real problems in any context, cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created those problems in the first instance. In other words, boxlike thinking simply cannot resolve the problems created by the box itself. We are in dire need of some Einsteinian originality if we are going to engage the issues of the twenty-first century with any real missional effectiveness. It's time to step out of the box of Christendom in order to take on the problems raised by Christendom.

2. See http://www.gocn.org/.

Christendom—Get Over It!

Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth. Its sources go back to the time when Constantine came to the throne of the Roman Empire and granted Christians complete freedom of worship and even favored Christianity, thereby undermining all other religions in the empire.[3] In virtually an instant, Christianity moved from being a marginalized, subversive, and persecuted movement secretly gathering in houses and catacombs to being the favored religion in the empire. Everything changed! The emperor had changed from being the principal persecutor of Christianity to being the chief sponsor of the church. With the Edict of Milan, the age of the missional-apostolic church had come to an end. Things were to be very different from then on.

In the fifth to tenth centuries Christianity grew from infancy to adulthood throughout Western Europe, emerging in the eleventh century as fully grown and in control of the culture. By the Middle Ages, the church-state symbiosis was formalized into an institutional interdependence between the pope and the ruler of what was then called the Holy Roman Empire, effectively Western Europe today. This institutional partnership between church and state changed forever the social behaviors and religious patterning of Europe. In the *corpus Christianum* (viz. Christendom), church and state became the pillars of the sacral culture, each supporting the other. Even where there existed conflicts between church and state, it was always a conflict *within* the overarching configuration of Christendom itself. Christendom had by this stage developed its own distinct identity, one that provided the matrix for the understanding of both church and state. It had effectively become *the* metanarrative for an entire epoch. A metanarrative is an overarching story that claims to contain truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures. And while the Christendom story no longer defines Western culture, it still remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in almost every Western nation, including and perhaps especially the United States.

That metanarrative not only defined church and state, it defined all the individuals and social structures in its orbit of influence. Members of that society were assumed to be Christian by birth rather than by choice. Christianity was

3. When we proclaim Christendom dead, we use that term—Christendom—advisedly. We don't proclaim Christianity dead, nor the church. Jesus promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. But Christendom, that period of Western history during which the church held sway as the moral and spiritual centerpiece of civilization, has effectively vanished.

an official part of the established culture of Europe. In some countries, the king or queen actually became the head of the church. Overall, Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood, and sacraments.

Taken as a sociopolitical reality, Christendom has been in decline for the last 250 years, so much so that contemporary Western culture has been called by many historians (secular and Christian) as the *post-Christendom* culture. Society, at least in its overtly non-Christian manifestation, is "over" Christendom. But this is not the case within the Western church itself. Christendom, as a paradigm of understanding, as a metanarrative, still exercises an overweening influence on our existing theological, missiological, and ecclesiological understandings in church circles. In other words, we still think of the church and its mission in terms of Christendom. While in reality we are in a post-Christendom context, the Western church still operates for the most part in a Christendom mode. Constantine, it seems, is still the emperor of our imaginations.

Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Mode (AD 32 to 313)	**Advance and Triumph of Christendom Mode (313 to current)**	**The Missional Mode (past 20+ years)**
Didn't have dedicated sacral buildings. Often underground and persecuted.	Buildings become central to the notion, and experience, of church.	Rejects the concern and need for dedicated "church" buildings.
Leadership operating with a fivefold ministry-leadership ethos.	Leadership by an institutionally ordained clergy operating primarily in a pastor-teacher mode.	Leadership embraces a pioneering-innovative mode including a fivefold ministry-leadership ethos. Non-institutional by preference.
Grassroots, decentralized movement.	Institutional-hierarchical notion of leadership and structure.	Grassroots, decentralized movements.
Communion celebrated as a sacralized community meal.	Increasing institutionalization of grace through the sacraments.	Redeems, re-sacralizes, and ritualizes new symbols and events, including the meal.
Church is on the margins of society and underground.	Church is perceived as central to society and surrounding culture.	Church is once again on the fringes of society and culture. The church reembraces a missional stance in relation to culture.
Missionary, incarnational-sending church.	Attractional / "extractional."	Missional, incarnational-sending church.

A Tale of Two Pubs

To understand the difference between Christendom-like thinking and the missional model, the following examples might help. Recently it was reported that a congregation in a small rural town in Australia had taken an innovative step toward reaching its community. A Melbourne newspaper announced, "Patrons of the Hamilton Hotel will soon be offered spirit of a different kind. In an unusual conversion, the town's Baptist congregation—who are teetotalers—have taken over one of the six pubs."[4] The Hamilton community watched in amazement as the pub, located on the main street opposite the local post office, was bought by the Baptists and renovated into a church and conference center. Its front bar was turned into a recreation area for young people and its dance area was rebuilt into a chapel and meeting room. The bar was transformed into a coffee bar, the old pub now becoming an alcohol-free building.

In the article, various church leaders from Melbourne and the pastor of the Hamilton Baptist Church spoke of the relocation as innovative, creative, and daring. However, one sour note was sounded. Midway through the newspaper article a local from Hamilton is quoted. "One of the hotel's former regulars, farmer Bruce McKellar, 71, said he would miss his corner of the bar. 'I would walk in and straight to it; we all had our own space,' he said." The implied sadness of this comment wasn't lost on us. Farmer McKellar had been displaced from his personal seat at the bar, and though he had probably moved on to one of the other pubs, he would never again be welcomed at his favorite watering hole. In Australia, like England, the local pub is a place of acceptance and friendship. Patrons develop allegiances to their pubs and though they might visit another one occasionally, they feel a deep connection to *their local* (as it's called). Though American bars can be less friendly, more foreboding places, the myth perpetuated in the successful television show *Cheers,* about a place "where everybody knows your name," is true of most English and Australian pubs. In Hamilton, farmers, tradesmen, and business people had been shooed out of the Hamilton Hotel to make way for the Baptists.

This project, though appearing innovative, in fact reflects Christendom thinking. It assumes that the church belongs prominently on the main street, and it claims that the church has the right to take over a public space and clean out the local people while creating a so-called sanctified religious zone. Whether it's in a pub, a school auditorium, or a two-hundred-year-old cathedral, it

4. ADD TITLE, *Sunday Herald Sun*, Melbourne, Australia, 15 October 2000, 3.

represents the same thinking. As we will seek to demonstrate, what is needed is the abandonment of the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world and the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption.

On the other side of the planet, in the English town of Bradford, another pub has been transformed by Christians. The Cock & Bottle is a yellow, two-story English pub at the bottom of the street on the corner of Bradford's inner ring road. Two years ago it was rented by the Bradford Christian Pub Consortium. Bradford is a hardscrabble, working-class town. It has been noted in recent times for its racial conflict and street violence. But the Cock & Bottle represents a place of sanctuary and solace. Malcolm Willis has been employed by the consortium to manage the pub, and he and his wife live upstairs above the bar. He proves himself to be a genuinely missional leader when he says, "Jesus said go into all the world. And this includes pubs. He didn't say sit in your church and wait for people to come to you."[5] The Willises and their staff (all Christians) have set about creating a loving, welcoming environment, where locals are cared for, listened to, and ministered to. Says Willis, "Initially, many won't accept you talking about Jesus. Maybe after you've listened to them ten or twenty times—which can be exhausting—they might say 'Can you pray for me?' And then you see things happen."[6] The missional church always thinks of the long haul rather than the quick fix.

Of course, the dilemma about whether Christians should be serving alcohol or not is bound to arise. Willis is himself a teetotaler, but he has an earthy and realistic outlook on the issue of drinking, "Yes, we're selling booze to people who could do without it, but if we don't, they'll just go somewhere else—at least if they're here, we can get alongside them. I knew that when I came here I personally had to be seen not to drink, but I'm not everybody. Someone once showed me Proverbs 31, which says, 'Beer and wine are only for the dying or for those who have lost all hope. Let them drink and forget how poor and miserable they feel. But you must defend those who are helpless and have no hope.' So I have to ask, What would Jesus have done? I think the Lord would have been here in the pubs."[7]

There is a world of difference (and not just geographically) between the Cock & Bottle and the Hamilton Hotel. The former is missional, incarnational, and very risky. The latter is safe. It demonstrates sound financial management

5. Sarah Chapman, "Last Orders," *Interact*, SMG (July–September 2001): 14.
6. Ibid., 16.
7. Ibid., 17.

(it was cheaper for the Baptist Church to renovate the pub than to build a brand-new building). But it is classic Christendom thinking.

GOCN, to whom we referred earlier, has fostered much research into cultural trends and the revisioning of a new (missional) approach to church. They have come up with twelve hallmarks of a missional church:

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

We can't fault any of these features, but we would like to propose three more, overarching principles that give energy and direction to the above-mentioned marks. In fact, we will use these three features as the headings for three of the broad sections of this book. These three principles are:

1. The missional church is *incarnational,* not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him.
2. The missional church is *messianic,* not dualistic, in its spirituality. That is, it adopts the worldview and practices of Jesus the Messiah, rather than that of the Greco-Roman empire. Instead of seeing the world

as divided between the sacred (religious) and profane (nonreligious), like Christ it sees the world and God's place in it as more holistic and integrated.

3. The missional church adopts an *apostolic,* rather than a one-dimensional top-down, mode of leadership. By apostolic we mean a mode of leadership that recognizes the fivefold model detailed by Paul in Ephesians
4. It abandons the triangular hierarchies of the traditional church and embraces a biblical, flatter leadership community that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, and prophecy, as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts.

We believe the missional genius of the church can only be unleashed when there are foundational changes made to the church's very DNA, and this means addressing core issues like ecclesiology, spirituality, and leadership. It means a complete shift away from Christendom thinking, which is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical.

Many Christians seem to have great difficulty giving up on the old Christendom-based assumptions. They fear that to finally abandon Christendom means we cast the church into oblivion or chaos. They would ask, How could a bunch of Christians running a pub in Bradford be a church? Well, we think they can be. Many of the ways the missional church is emerging around the world look messy, chaotic, and dynamic. They don't always meet in the same room on a Sunday for church services, but they are worshipping God, building Christian community, and serving their world. They meet the biblical criteria for a church, but they don't often look like church as we are used to thinking of it. A helpful way of looking at the post-Christendom church is to see not disorder but a diaspora. This is the view of theologian Douglas John Hall who prefers to think of the contemporary church as a diaspora rather than as an institution. He sees this as a more positive reformulation than the resignation or defeatism of seeing Christendom's end as chaotic. He says:

> If we once have the courage to give up our defense of the old facades which have nothing or very little behind them; if we cease to maintain, in public, the pretense of a universal Christendom; if we stop straining every nerve to get *everybody* baptized, to get *everybody* married in church and onto our registers (even when success means only, at bottom, a victory for tradition, custom and ancestry, not for true faith and interior conviction); if, by letting go, we visibly relieve Christianity of the burdensome impression that it accepts responsibility for everything that goes on under this Christian topdressing, the impression that

> Christianity is a sort of Everyman's Religious Varnish, a folk-religion (at the same level as that of folk-costumes)—*then* we can be free for real missionary adventure and apostolic self-confidence.[8]

Touché! We couldn't have said it better! So then, what are the effects that Christendom has had on our understanding of the church and its mission, and why is it so important to "get over it"?[9]

Christendom in its essence is a certain stance in relation to its context, a mode of engagement, and a way of thinking about the church. Given its privileged status at the center of culture, its view of mission is fundamentally distorted. What's more, it has a very fixed, very *concrete*, notion of the church—one normally associated with (distinctly designed) buildings, liturgies, denominational templates, and clergy. Its missional mode is primarily attractional/extractional rather than sending or incarnational. It assumes a certain centrality as the official religion of the culture, and its placement of buildings (usually the tallest building in the medieval setting) symbolizes that centrality. Its type of leadership can generally be described as priestly, sometimes prophetic to insiders but almost never to outsiders (no one "out there" is listening), and rarely apostolic. Christendom has moved Christianity into a maintenance mode.

Christendom, when viewed from a missiological perspective, is more than the symbiotic relationship between church and state that resulted in a move away from the normative apostolic-missionary mode of the New Testament. When Christianity was recognized and accepted in 313 and then gained favored status with the imperial courts, it altered the fundamental *mode* of the church's self-understanding and its conception of its unique task in the world. Because a type of "contract" now existed between the church and the political powers, the church's understanding of itself in relation to that state, culture, and society was profoundly changed. We don't mean to discount the incredible mission movements that occurred sporadically in the fifth to the tenth centuries. But it is fair to say that by the triumph of Christendom in the eleventh century, mission was no longer seen as necessary within Europe. It was delimited to identifiable non-Christian religions both inside and outside of the realm, but no longer to those baptized by the official church. Theology was now used as a powerful political tool. So too were missions. Mission was used as a means of colonization and advancement of various state interests.

8. Douglas John Hall, "Metamorphosis: From Christendom to Diaspora," in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 67.

9. The effects of Christendom on our theological perspective in general are outside of the focus of this book. In this discussion, we will focus primarily (and briefly) on the effects on our notion of the church and of our understanding of its mission.

Christendom set up a certain correlation, a complex of assumptions, about the association between the realms of politics, geography, church, spirituality, and mission. As a result the gospel was politicized, regionalized, as well as *racial*-ized. There was no longer any real place for the subversive activity associated with the New Testament gospel. The "revolution" was quelled from the inside. The historical institution of the church from then on would brook little prophetic criticism of the political realm that threatened the church's elite status in the empire and vice versa.

The Bankruptcy of Christendom

The fact that the Christendom paradigm has presided over the last seventeen centuries in the West provides us with a substantial basis with which to test its success or failure. As we stand here at the roots of the 21st Century, we believe that we must, at long last, give up trying to rejig the paradigm to suit the massively changed missional contexts of the Western church. *It simply has not worked*. In fact, in the increasingly complex situations we now find ourselves, it has likely created more problems than it has solved. The church is in decline in almost every context in the First World. In this situation, naïve applications of traditionalist paradigms create problems . . . they don't resolve them.[10] For those holding on to the Christendom mode, it is as if they were trying to interpret the cosmos with a pre-Copernican view of the world. The paradigm doesn't fit. The emperor has been shown to have no clothes.

It's now a matter of record that one of the reasons for the loss of influence exercised by the church in the West has been its flirtation with modernity and the ideas of the Enlightenment. Says John Drane, "No persecutor or foe in two thousand years has wreaked such havoc on the church as has modernity."[11] By the end of the era of modernity in the mid-twentieth century, the Christian faith was no longer the center of Western culture. It had been swept away by the very movement it had sought to befriend. Where once the church in Europe occupied a place of significant influence, by the end of the twentieth century it was almost completely irrelevant. In Europe, the United Kingdom, and its colonial outposts, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the church had been displaced from its central position.

10. For an excellent exploration of how simply applying solutions formulated in a different era creates more problems than it solves, see Joshua Cooper Ramo, (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2010). See also the introduction of Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

11. John Drane, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 13.

Martin Robinson cites the Swedish church as an example.[12] He notes that even though a law that prohibited Swedish citizens leaving the Church of Sweden was lifted in 1860, very few actually do. In fact, a huge 95 percent of the population are members of the national church. However, a recent study found that only 8 percent of all Swedes adhere to a Christian worldview. When you consider that that figure would undoubtedly comprise a good number of the 5 percent who have opted to join another church, there are very few official members of the Church of Sweden who hold to its tenets. The national church exists in name only. It is an artifice. The same can be said of other Western European nations.

We must admit that Christendom, particularly its ecclesiological and its missiological manifestations, amounts to something of a failed experiment. To reiterate, by the term Christendom, we are referring to a period in history when the church assumed influence by its connection to temporal, secular power. Its high watermark occurred in the Middle Ages and continued beyond the Reformation well into the 1700s. Since the emergence of the Enlightenment it has been in decline, disappearing in the latter part of the twentieth century. It is time to move on and find a new mode of understanding and engagement with surrounding contexts. We can no longer afford our historical sentimentality, even addiction, to the past. Christendom is *not* the biblical mode of the church. It was/is merely one way in which the church has conceived of itself. In enshrining it as the sole form of the church, we have made it into an idol that has captivated our imaginations and enslaved us to a historical-cultural expression of the church. We have not answered the challenges of our time precisely because we refuse to let go of the idol. This must change! The answer to the problem of mission in the West requires something far more radical than reworking a dated and untenable model. It will require that we adopt something that looks far more like the early church in terms of its conception of the church (ecclesiology) and its core task in the world (missiology).

The Rise of the Missional Church

When there are megashifts in a culture, there tends to be a reconceptualization of the church. The more profound the cultural shift, the more thorough is the shift in the church's notion of itself. The most noteworthy example of this was the innate connection between the Renaissance of the fifteenth century and the Reformation of the early sixteenth century. The Renaissance, particularly

12. Martin Robinson, (London: Monarch, 1997), 13.

with its new hermeneutics, set in motion cultural forces that led inexorably to Luther's revolution, which in turn unleashed a massive recalibration in both church theology and praxis. The church is inseparably related to its cultural milieu. This provides a vital lesson for our day. We are living in an epoch-shifting period in the West (and globally) as we shift from the modern to the postmodern. There is every indication that this cultural shift will be even more profound and radical than was the shift precipitated by the Renaissance, which took place within the auspices of Christendom. What is happening now is entirely outside of any discernible Christian influence.

We propose that what will emerge from the chaos of the current social-historical shift to the postmodern is likely to be a second reformation as the church rediscovers itself as an apostolic movement. In fact, we suggest that if the church in the West does not embrace such a radical recalibration, it will find itself increasingly imperiled. The standard Christendom model will simply not engage the new generations.[13] To reach them and all other innumerable subcultures, the church should abandon its role as a static institution and embrace its initial calling to be a missionary movement. What is the nature of this apostolic movement? Whereas Christendom has unraveled because of its captivity to Western culture, the missional church must see itself as being able to interact meaningfully with culture without ever being beguiled by it. This is the classic task of the cross-cultural missionary: to engage culture without compromising the gospel. We cannot emphasize this enough. In fact, the whole tenor of this book will be to call post-Christendom to see itself again as a *missionary movement* rather than as an institution.

Essentially the early church was a missional movement to its core. It understood that personal conversion implied the embracing of the *missio Dei*—the redemptive mission of God to the whole world through the work of his Messiah. It is in this sense that we use the word *apostolic,* and it is this redemptive mission that we seek to recover for our own day. Forging apostolic movements will require massive paradigm shifts in the Christendom-based church. It requires a different kind of thinking that innovates new modes of doing and being church and recasts its notions of leadership, structure, and mission.

The church by its very nature has an indissoluble relationship to the surrounding cultural context. This relationship defines the practical nature of its mission. But the reason for mission comes from somewhere else. To say it more theologically, Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology which in turn returns back to Christology in a continuous cycle of

13. See the latest research by Dave Kinnaman of the Barna Research Group, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

renewal. It is absolutely vital that the church gets the order right. We will deal with the christological issue in a later chapter and then present the practical implications in another chapter. It is Christ who determines our purpose and mission in the world (discipleship), and then it is our mission that must drive our search for modes of being-in-the-world.

We began with the question "Evolution or Revolution?" Actually, while some forms of evolutionary development are necessary, the real answer is *revolution*. The church that Jesus intended was clearly meant to be a permanent revolution and not a codified civil religion, mere chaplains to the prevailing empire. As we will point out in the next chapter, we feel that we are living in an incredibly urgent time that can be described as the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of Western culture, and the message of the church is not even getting any airplay. We cannot expect to impact Western culture by simply renovating disused pubs. A completely alternate model is required. If we fail at this point, history will judge us very harshly. It is likely, in our home of Australia at least, that it will spell the church's demise as a significant spiritual force in our land, and the church will be consigned to being a footnote to history. The statistics bear this out right across the West. This is not a time for evolutionary approaches alone, as if another desperate reworking of the old model is going to fix our problems and start a revival. It is time for a revolution in the way we do and are church.

2

The Missional Church

> It is necessary for the Church to rethink its stance entirely and to become a missionary church within the West.
>
> —Martin Robinson

Hope of Post-Christendom

A missional church is the hope of the post-Christendom era. Many of the new Protestant church movements of recent years are simply variations on the old Christendom mode. Whether they place their emphasis on new worship styles, expressions of the Holy Spirit's power, evangelism to seekers, or Bible teaching, these so-called new movements still operate out of the fallacious assumption that the church belongs firmly in the town square, that is, at the heart of Western culture. And if they begin with this mistaken belief about their position in Western society, all their church planting, all their reproduction will simply mirror this misapprehension. When we reflect on the 1990s, the declared Decade of Evangelism, we are given cause for deep concern. For all the flurry of activity across the West, in particular in the US and the UK, church numbers have continued to decline. When once it was assumed that church planting was the strategy for reaching a postmodern West, church-growth experts are now having second thoughts. Church membership has been flagging, and as the Decade of Evangelism proceeded, fewer and fewer

churches were being planted. Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, in their booklet *Hope from the Margins,* identify a number of reasons why the church-planting boom has gone bust.

- Most churches which were able to plant another church early in the 1990s have not yet recovered sufficiently to do so again;
- Few newly-planted churches have yet grown quickly enough to plant another church;
- The dominance of personnel-intensive models of church planting have discouraged smaller churches from becoming involved;
- A disturbing number of church plants have failed, have remained small and weak, or have attracted only those who were already Christians;
- Church planting has generally been restricted to areas where churches are already flourishing, leaving many urban and rural areas untouched.[1]

The heart of the problem is that we have been planting churches that are (smaller) carbon copies of the already beleaguered, failing Christendom-style church. The Christendom virus is passed on. It's like Dr. Evil, in Mike Myers's ridiculous *Austin Powers* movies, creating a clone called Mini-Me. By duplicating a failing system, we are digging the same hole deeper in our attempt to dig somewhere else. In fact, it's more often than not been the case that Sunday services are planted rather than missional Jesus communities. A missional church on the other hand has abandoned the old Christendom assumptions and understands its role as an underground movement, subversive, celebratory, passionate, and communal. Mission is not merely an activity of the church. It is the very heartbeat and work of God. It is in the very being of God that the basis for the missionary enterprise is found. God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and creation reconciled, redeemed, and healed. The missional church, then, is a sent church. It is a *going* church, a movement of God through his people, sent to bring healing to a broken world. North America is as much a mission field as any other nation or people group on the face of the earth. The existing church, which is invariably static, rooted in one place, institutionalized, needs to recover its *sent-ness* in order to become the missional church.

The overly reproduced Christendom-mode church has at its core a number of fundamental flaws. These flaws occur in the model's very DNA. The way forward is not to tinker with its external features, but to rebirth a new movement on different ground. Those flaws can be generally categorized into three

1. Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, (Cambridge, England: Grove, 2000), 4–5.

broad areas. Although we will introduce them here, we will deal with them fully throughout various sections of this book.

Attractional, Dualistic, Hierarchical

As mentioned, the Christendom-mode church has these three flaws in its DNA—it is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical. First, by attractional, we mean that the traditional church plants itself within a particular community, neighborhood, or locale and expects that people will come to it to meet God and find fellowship with others. We don't claim that there's anything unbiblical about being attractive to unbelievers. The early church was attractive to the wider community (Acts 2:47), though there is much more evidence that the church was reviled and avoided in its early days. Nonetheless, when we say it is a flaw for the church to be attractional, we refer more to the missionary stance the church takes toward the broader host communities and cultures it inhabits. By anticipating that if they get their internal features right, people will flock to the services, the church betrays its belief in attractionalism. It's like the Kevin Costner character in the film *Field of Dreams* being told by a disembodied voice, "If you build it, they will come." Viewed in this light, we can best call this approach "extractional" or perhaps even "excarnational."

How much of the traditional church's energy goes into adjusting their programs and their public meetings to cater to an unseen constituency? If we get our seating, our parking, our children's program, our preaching, and our music right, they will come. This assumes that we have a place in our society and that people don't join our churches because, though they want to be Christians, they're unhappy with the product. The missional church recognizes that it does not hold a place of honor in its host community and that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into that host community as salt and light.

When we have consulted with churches that recognize the need to embrace a missionary stance in their communities, we are amazed at the number of times, when asked to discuss specific ways they can recalibrate themselves to become missional churches, they begin talking about how to change their Sunday service. It betrays their fundamental allegiance to being attractional. We believe the development of indigenous, contextualized worship occurs in partnership with new believers from one's host community. The tailoring of worship services is a lot further down the priority list for missional church leaders. The Come-To-Us stance developed over the Christendom period is

unbiblical. It's not found in the Gospels or the Epistles. Jesus, Paul, the disciples, the early church leaders all had a Go-To-Them mentality.

Second, the Christendom-mode church is dualistic. It separates the sacred from the profane, the holy from the unholy, the in from the out. What we have said so far about the sickness of attractionalism finds its roots in the church's dualistic spirituality. We will apply this more fully to the missional church model in the third section of this book. But in brief, we are convinced that the church has so fully embraced its attractional stance because of its dualistic spirituality. We talk routinely about the "world out there." What else can that mean other than that we, the church people, are "in here"! This dualism has over 1,700 years created Christians that cannot relate their interior faith to their exterior practice, and this affects their ethics, their lifestyles, and their capacity to share their faith meaningfully with others. In Robert Banks's groundbreaking book, *Redeeming the Routines*, he identifies the enormous gap between belief and everyday life. He points out that this gap shows up in ten worrying ways:

1. Few of us apply or know how to apply our belief to our work, or lack of work.
2. We only make minimal connections between our faith and our spare time activities.
3. We have little sense of a Christian approach to regular activities like domestic chores.
4. Our everyday attitudes are partly shaped by the dominant values of our society.
5. Many of our spiritual difficulties stem from the daily pressure we experience (lack of time, exhaustion, family pressures, etc.).
6. Our everyday concerns receive little attention in the church.
7. Only occasionally do professional theologians address routine activities.
8. When addressed, everyday issues tend to be approached too theoretically.
9. Only a minority of Christians read religious books or attend theological courses.
10. Most churchgoers reject the idea of a gap between their beliefs and their ways of life.[2]

Banks quotes occasionally from an old book called *Christianity and Real Life*, written by William Diehl, the sales manager of a major overseas steel corporation. Diehl, as a layman (terrible word, but you understand

2. Robert Banks, (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1997), 50–65.

its meaning), writes about the gap between the secular and the sacred in church circles:

> In the almost thirty years of my professional career, my church has never once suggested that there be any type of accounting of my on-the-job ministry to others. My church has never once offered to improve those skills which could make me a better minister, nor has it ever asked if I needed any kind of support in what I was doing. There has never been an inquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate the faith to my coworkers. I have never been in a congregation where there was any type of public affirmation of a ministry in my career. In short, I must conclude that my church really doesn't have the least interest whether or how I minister in my daily work.[3]

This credibility gap between the church world and the real world is, as theologian Helmut Thielicke calls it, a modern form of Docetism.[4] We believe that it is so endemic in the contemporary church that it has worked its way into the very fabric of all aspects of church life. Remove this Docetism, or dualism, from church and a great deal of what the church has built and developed over 1,700 years will fall away. Because the missional church, by its very nature, exists organically within its host community, it has had to abandon Western Christianity's dualistic worldview in favor of a whole-of-life spirituality.

Third, the traditional church (Christendom) is hierarchical, deeply indebted to what we see as an overly religious, bureaucratic, top-down model of leadership, as opposed to one that is more structured around grassroots agendas. While some denominations are ideologically committed to a very top-down hierarchical model that includes archbishops, bishops, priests, and parish councils, others (who call themselves low church) are equally indebted to top-down approaches via regional superintendents, senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, and deacons. From Pentecostals to the Orthodox Church, from Baptists to Episcopalians and Presbyterians, the hierarchical model seems to be universal. For how much longer can the church ignore

3. William Diehl, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), v–vi, quoted in Banks, , 59.

4. "Docetism is in essence a Christology heavily influenced by basic Greek assumptions of both the Platonic and Aristotelian varieties. Plato taught the idea of gradations of reality. Spirit or mind or thought is the highest. Matter or the material is less real. With this distinction of ontological gradations of reality, there came to be ethical gradations as well. Thus, matter came to be thought of as morally bad. Aristotle emphasized the idea of divine impassability, according to which God cannot change, suffer, or even be affected by anything that happens in the world. These two streams of thought have significant differences, but both maintain that the visible, physical, material world is somehow inherently evil. Both emphasize God's transcendence and absolute difference from and independence of the material world." Millard J. Erickson, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 713.

Paul's radical dissolution of the traditional distinctions between priests and laity, between officials and ordinary members, between holy men and common people? Says English pastor Rob Warner:

> The first Christians radically reshaped the language of "priesthood" and "sacrifice." In one sense all are priests; believers are their own priests for all have immediacy of access to God's grace in Christ. What priests have performed for others before, believers can now do for themselves. In another sense, none can be appointed priests in the Christian church, for Christ has fulfilled the priestly role once for all.[5]

Some younger leaders are discovering that in the emerging global cultural context the hierarchical model has little to say to a generation that values egalitarianism and community. Dan Mayhew, who works with Summit Fellowships in Portland, Oregon, has come to understand that to minister to an emerging generation of young people with authenticity, he has had to completely flatten his organization's leadership style. He says, "I make a distinction between hierarchy and '*heir-archy*.' We are to be fellow heirs with one another. It's a bit of a play on words, but I think it conveys something very real. We are used to the systematic approach to things, so we create hierarchies. But the organic approach is more to create heir-archies where you are all fellow heirs to the grace of God."[6]

What Should We Do Instead?

Gerard Kelly, in his timely book *RetroFuture*, takes issue with the current conception of church when he says, "I believe the church must change. The church is not trend-driven; it is God's family and lives by other rules. But it is also a cultural and social institution, rooted in a given place and time. If we have any concern for the rising generations—and for those who will follow them—we must look with urgency to the future shape of our church."[7] He goes on to quote Tom Sine's oft-rehearsed warning, "Every denomination and religious organization I have worked with does long-range planning. Ironically, they do long-range planning as though the future will simply be an extension of the present. . . . As a result, we are chronically surprised by change. In the future, we can no longer afford this luxury."[8]

5. Rob Warner, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 131.
6. Dan Mayhew and Brad Sargent, (October 1997): 67.
7. Gerard Kelly, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 17.
8. Tom Sine, (Crowborough, England: Monarch, 1992), quoted in Kelly, , 17.

So, what will the future shape of the church look like? If it takes the form we propose for the missional church, it will look vastly varied in its many different contexts. But we can be sure that there will be some common values across the board. It will place a high value on communal life, more open leadership structures, and the contribution of all the people of God. It will be radical in its attempts to embrace biblical mandates for the life of locally based faith communities without feeling as though it has to reconstruct the first-century church in every detail. We believe the missional church will be adventurous, playful, and surprising. Leonard Sweet has borrowed the term "chaordic" to describe the missional church's inclination toward chaos and improvisation within the constraints of broadly held biblical values. It will gather for sensual-experiential-participatory worship and be deeply concerned for matters of justice-seeking and mercy-bringing. It will strive for a type of unity-in-diversity as it celebrates individual differences and values uniqueness, while also placing a high premium on community. Bishop Gladwin, expressed in his book on the postmodern church, believes that the emerging missional church will have these four features in common:

1. focus on the journey of faith and the experience of God;
2. desire for less structure and more direct involvement by participants;
3. sense of flexibility in order and a distinctly nonhierarchical culture;
4. recognition that the experience of church is about the sustaining of discipleship.

He concludes, "So the church will focus on core faith, on minimum essential order, on people and their gifts, on flexible patterns of life held together in communion and on a shared sense of community."[9] And this from a bishop!

We appreciate that working models are often more informative than theoretical ones. What follows are a few case studies of the missional church around the world.

Church in the Missional Mode

When Tim and Kristy Cobillas set out to begin a church in the northern landscape of Saint Louis, Missouri, in 2001, they had no idea that it would evolve into an outlaw biker haven. Joshua House began as an informal worship gathering around a backyard bonfire on a two-acre plot of suburban

9. John Gladwin, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), 209.

wilderness that included Tim and Kristy's house and a converted two-story garage that served as a sort of clubhouse and worship sanctuary all in one.

Tim's "real job" as a motorcycle builder kept him connected to the biker culture throughout the years, and as Joshua House began to develop into a community of faith, more and more of Tim's clients began showing up around the campfire. The presence of so many bikers caused Tim to eventually found and lead the Faithful Few, an outlaw Christian motorcycle club.

The Faithful Few is not a collection of middle-age suburban dads living out their Wild Hogs fantasies on the weekends. Far from it. These guys are the real deal. Tim shared with us that just a couple of days before we visited with him, he had baptized an outlaw biker he had been cultivating a relationship with for five years. This particular biker was known as an *enforcer*. We will leave the definition of that title to your imagination. Tim points out, "When these dudes come to Christ, they do so radically. They are radical cats, and just as radical as they were in the outlaw biker lifestyle, they go just as hard for Christ." One of his hardest jobs in discipling outlaw biker converts is for them not to "enforce" Christ upon their unconverted buddies. The objective is to create a circle of relationships among guys who have lived the outlaw biker life and want to become faithful and committed followers of Christ while still living in the biker culture.

Tim stresses that Joshua House is not a biker church per se. "We don't look at bikers as tokens for us to claim or highlight. But they have found a refuge and a community here." Joshua House is made up of an eclectic mix of straight-laced college students, middle-aged couples, single moms, and the biker crowd. It would be a gross understatement to say a Sunday morning at Joshua House is not your normal church service. Depending on the season, folks gather either outside nearby the organic garden and campfire or inside the downstairs clubhouse for pancakes, bagels, or other breakfast fare. Eventually the whole troop makes its way to the *upper room* for singing, prayer, and a typical sermon type of teaching.

Joshua House has no website or advertising other than the lives of its people who live to incarnate the message of the gospel in the midst of a culture that is somewhat hostile to the Christian idea. Speaking of the combination of Joshua House and the Faithful Few, Tim says, "We are an armpit in the body of Christ. We are not just an *everybody* church. We are an *anybody* church. Jesus went out and invited the tax collectors and outcasts to join him. We do the same thing."

This is missional church thinking. Instead of planting a traditional, attractional church, Tim and Kristy engage in the very rhythms and life of a host culture to genuinely listen to their hopes and fears. A similar experiment

is the Hope Community in Wolverhampton, England. Three Roman Catholic sisters were asked by their parish church to conduct a community survey in Heath Town, an impoverished public housing project comprising nine high-rise buildings. They began simply by listening to the voices of the community. What they heard was a litany of despair, pain, and great social need. Unable to continue the "survey" and then return to their comfortable chapter house in a nearby middle-class suburb, they rented an apartment on the third floor of one of the bleak towers. There, they continued their regular life of community and prayer, making themselves much more available to the local people. The missional church assumes that proximity to a host community is essential.

Interestingly, as Sister Margaret Walsh reports it, none of the sisters set out to initiate anything.[10] They simply lived with and listened to their neighbors. But their gracious presence catalyzed many social changes. Housing project church services have begun, planned and led by local people. The sisters offer computer courses and literacy training, and have hosted holiday events—all contributing greatly to an improved quality of life for the residents. The integrity of their community and the power of their sense of mission have been salt and light in the public housing community. While the sisters resist calling what they're doing "church," the rest of the community clearly identify the nuns' apartment as their chapel. Like Tim and Kristy, the sisters have not come to impose anything on their host community. But by being Christ in the midst of their respective people groups, they make the assumption that God is already present and already touching peoples' lives. They don't presume to "bring" God to St. Louis or to Heath Town, but they do desire to be used by the Spirit to transform individuals and cultures for Christ's sake by the God who was already there.

Proximity Spaces

With these two working models as background, we are able to identify some of the shared traits that we observe in various missional churches. Four characteristics deserve special consideration: proximity spaces, shared projects, commercial enterprise, and emerging indigenous faith communities. By proximity spaces, we mean places or events where Christians and not-yet-Christians can interact meaningfully with each other.

Located in the small midwestern town of Newton, Kansas (population 15,000), is Norm's Coffee Bar. Robert Palmer began it as a place for people of a multiplicity of backgrounds to gather and experience community. He also

10. Margaret Walsh, Urban Theology Unit, New City Special No. 8, 1991.

pastors Stone Creek Community Church, which meets in the same building that houses Norm's Coffee Bar—but unless you knew the church also meets there, you would never know it. There are no church advertisements in the space. This is to say, the space has not been *Christianized*. It is neutral territory.

Dreaming of a space that would promote the type of community evoked in the mythical *Cheers*, a Boston pub from the 1980s television show by the same name, Palmer's team named the place Norm's, after *Cheers* patron Norm Peterson, whose entry to the pub is routinely met with a group greeting of "Hi, Norm!" Robert said, "A bar is really a counterfeit for the church. Everybody is welcome. Everyone does know your name. They're accepting. It doesn't matter what your background is or where you've come from. And there is always someone to talk to who doesn't judge you but just listens to your story. And the idea for us was to create Norm's Coffee 'bar' and to see if that could happen. And it has. Here, people come to us. And they just share their stories. I stand behind this counter and people open their hearts up." Norm's has become a public space being used by groups and organizations throughout the city, including the Chamber of Commerce.

Around the world, Christians are developing cafés, nightclubs, art galleries, design studios, football teams, etc., to facilitate such proximity and interaction. If the church service is the only space where we can meaningfully interact with unbelievers, we're in trouble. In Birmingham, England, Pip Piper, the founder of a design studio called One Small Barking Dog (great name!), runs a monthly gathering in a local café, the Medicine Bar. He has negotiated permission from the landlord to deck the premises out as a "spiritual space." Using incense, projected images, and ambient religious music, he designed a spiritual zone he calls Maji, where artists who would normally patronize the Medicine Bar as well as invited friends can hang out, experience the ambience, and talk about faith, religion, and spirituality—it's a classic proximity space.

Shared Projects

Second, missional church thinking values the development of shared or joint projects between the Christian community and its host community. Proximity spaces are excellent for casual interaction. Shared projects allow the Christians to partner with unbelievers in useful, intrinsically valuable activities within the community. In the context of that partnership, significant connections can be established. The church can initiate these shared projects though presented as a community-wide activity. Or the Christian community can simply get behind existing projects. The important thing is to find joint projects that put Christians and not-yet-Christians shoulder-to-shoulder in a lengthy partnership.

Time is an issue here. We need to find or develop projects that allow the time for important friendships to form.

Allan Tibbels was a 26-year-old quadriplegic in the mid-1980s when he moved into Sandtown, one of the toughest neighborhoods in Baltimore. He and his wife Susan were inspired by the writings of evangelist and civil rights worker John M. Perkins to live incarnationally by moving into the ghetto. What they found in Sandtown was nothing but overpriced rental units, every one of them a firetrap leased by an absentee landlord. Transience, homelessness, and the constant threat of eviction were everyday experiences there. And yet the neighborhood was pockmarked by vacant lots. Even though he couldn't move his arms or legs, Tibbels believed he could build affordable housing for his neighbors on this land. He turned to Habitat for Humanity for help.

Although he knew nothing about housing and couldn't swing a hammer himself, Tibbels scrounged enough donations and local volunteers to get a Habitat house built in 1990. Such was the response to this minor miracle across Baltimore that the funds for more houses began to flow and soon Tibbels announced he would build another hundred houses, with mortgages of about $300 a month, less than half the typical rent. Committed to partnering with the residents of Sandtown, Tibbels only hired from the neighborhood, which meant his staff grew to include ex-cons, addicts, and dealers. It also meant that he lost something in building efficiency and excellence, but in its place grew love. Maybe it was Tibbel's own brokenness that inspired the broken men and women of Sandtown to trust him in this foolhardy venture.

As a result, over two decades, a man who couldn't lift his arms built 286 houses. He also helped plant the New Song Community Church that grew out of the relationships Allan and Susan had built with their neighbors. One thousand people attended his funeral there in 2010, a service that saw politicians sitting next to drug dealers. The *New York Times* reported, "Someone once described Tibbels as 'saving Sandtown,' which made him wince. God saves; neighbors share."[11]

While in San Francisco, we had the opportunity to take a walk through the Hispanic mission district with Mark Scandrette, a bohemian artist who moved to the Bay Area to plant a church. He has discovered that by joining the neighborhood mural co-op (one of the oldest in the country), he literally stands shoulder-to-shoulder with non-Christians as they apply paint to murals across the city. He can also have input into what shape public art takes in San Francisco. In cities without a strong culture of public art, a Christian

11. Obituary, New York Times, cited: 24.12.10 http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/12/26/magazine/2010lives.html#view=allan_tibbels.

community might want to initiate such a cooperative. The missional church doesn't immediately think in terms of strategies, but in terms of people and places. As Bono from U2 says, "If Jesus were on earth you'd find him in a gay bar in San Francisco. He'd be working with people suffering from AIDS. These people are the new lepers. If you want to find out where Jesus would be hanging out it'll always be with the lepers."

Commercial Enterprise

Third, commercial enterprise is important. Bringing positive and tangible change speaks volumes to the host community. If we come to plant a church in a particular area, we're not perceived as doing anyone any favors. But if we're starting a café, an internet launderette, or a day-care center, we're seen as bringing some intrinsic value to a community. We're serving those to whom we're sent.

In Sheffield, England, a woman named Jane Grinnoneau has established a community-based business called the Furnival in a derelict English pub of the same name. Her story is one of sheer hard work as well as the miraculous provision of God (a great combination). The Furnival pub had been stripped, vandalized, and abandoned by the time Jane came across it while wandering lost in the notorious Burngreave public housing project one day. How she acquired the building and fully fitted it out to meet the needs of the local community is a story of God's miraculous grace. Now the Furnival is a skills center for local young people, with a training kitchen and café. There are plans for a launderette and a multiagency health and advice center. Burngreave was so nefarious that formal Christian witness had ended there when the Methodist Church finally pulled out years before Jane got there. If anyone had announced that they were planting another traditional church in the project, the local community would have wondered why and the denominational churches would have questioned the waste of resources. But the Furnival is a Christian community serving the host community and seeing the kingdom being extended in ways a conventional church could never have seen.

Even at a denominational level, people are beginning to see the incarnational value of planting service industries within a host community. As Robert Palmer has discovered, the right local business can create significant and intimate relationships with people not normally interested in church-based programs.

Emerging Indigenous Faith Communities

Fourth, indigenous faith communities ought to emerge from all this interaction with a host subculture. While it is a noble and, indeed, a godly activity

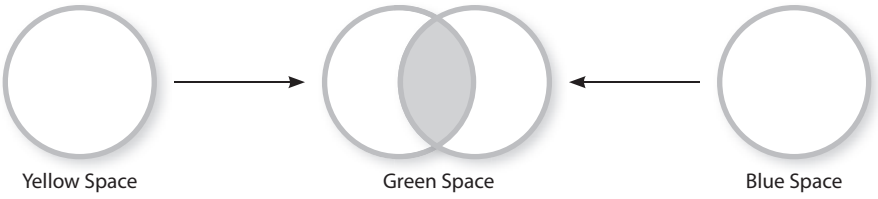
for a Christian businessman to run a shoe shop and to try to be Christ to his customers, something is missing if a Christian faith community isn't part of the equation. The Christian businessperson can engage colleagues, clients, and customers in a discussion of faith questions, but the best hermeneutic of the gospel is a community of Christians living it out. Robert Palmer, Margaret Walsh, Allan Tibbels, Jane Grinnoneau, and Pip Piper have developed their proximity spaces and their commercial ventures as missionaries. Their desire is to see the kingdom come and to see lives transformed by the power of Christ. Some have already developed faith communities from their incarnational activities, while for others it is still early days.

Some critics of the missional church ask, "When is the Bible taught? How do people learn doctrine?" We recognize these as valid questions. But we believe such learning takes place much more effectively when the Christian faith community is involved in active mission. Too much existing Bible teaching happens to passive groups of Christians, many of whom are not involved in any kind of risky missional activity. A missional church mobilizes all its members to be sent into the community. Like Jesus' first followers discovered, learning occurs when we need to draw on information because a situation demands it. This isn't to say that there shouldn't be formal teaching times, but these formal occasions will allow the teaching to be related to the missional experience gained by the church itself. It is important to note that the missional church combines the concern for community development normally characterized by the liberal churches and the desire for personal and community transformation normally characterized by the evangelical movement. This blurring of the old lines of demarcation between theologies, doctrine, and ideology within the church makes the way open for much more integrated mission to occur. It's like saying that we want to prepare like an evangelical; preach like a Pentecostal; pray like a mystic; do the spiritual disciplines like a Desert Father, art like a Catholic, and social justice like a liberal.

In fact, we have found that among many missional church leaders and thinkers there is a concern to balance ideas that are normally considered opposites. It is called both/and thinking and has been a feature of the emergent postmodern culture. Missional church thinking allows the dialogue between liberation theology, which says *context* is everything, and the post-liberals like Hauerwas and Brueggeman who say we need to get our *story* right. The missional church will take context seriously, but will also work on recovering the biblical narrative with its richness and potency for today's world. When story and context are equally embraced, we are beginning to think and act missionally. In San Francisco, a group calling itself ReImagine has been meeting to explore how this dialogue works itself out practically.

To do so, ReImagine refers to different colored spaces. Yellow space refers to a Christian spirituality that is only concerned with the personal, interior world of faith. It characterizes the classic individualized form of faith that focuses on personal quiet times, Bible study, church attendance, and personal moral/ethical behavior. Blue space refers to an exclusively other-focused form of Christian spirituality, one that takes context seriously and features such activities as social concern, justice-seeking, activism, and public moral/ethical behavior. It is only in the dialogue between them, says ReImagine, that we come close to biblical missional activity and spirituality, as illustrated by the diagram below:

Figure 1



Since the combination of yellow and blue on the color chart does make green, it's a clever way to think about missional spaces. They are *green spaces*. And missional Christians might rightly be referred to as *green people*. In a green space, story and context, the individual and the communal, the interior world and the exterior world, the religious and the non-religious, find genuine meeting. At ReImagine references to green people and green spaces are common.

Getting It Right

In sleepy suburban Pomona in Los Angeles, the front lawns are freshly cut and their edges trimmed. The streetlights glow a warm amber hue throughout the quiet evenings. Street signs announce that Pomona is a neighborhood-watch zone and tell would-be intruders that, "We report any suspicious persons or activities to our police department." But on downtown Second Street, something's up! Some years ago Second Street was transformed into an Arts Colony (an imposing sign over the street announces it as such), and now there are a number of dance venues, nightclubs, art studios, and hip clothing stores. There is a college of the arts in town, and Second Street is crawling with bohemians, punks, hip-hoppers, taggers, and performance artists. Posters in windows advertise everything from acting classes to stained

glass making, poetry readings, and mosaic table workshops. When we were visiting Pomona, there was a "Beginning Wicca" workshop and a panel discussion on "Woman in the Arts" happening that night. Music styles available in the various venues include blues, hip-hop, rock, house, punk, rockabilly, and Latino.

Right in the middle of this carnivalesque atmosphere of art and music, new age religion, and commercialism we discovered the Millennia Co-op at 181 Second Street. Although it no longer exists we found it's cohesion in the community offered several wonderful elements of a faith collective existing as servant to the host community. It was the brainchild of the radical missionaries John Jensen and the late Brian Ollman, and was a mission experiment that combined proximity spaces, shared projects, business enterprises, and indigenous faith communities. Their mission statement read, "The Millennia Co-op advances cultural renewal and personal transformation through the integration of the arts, community, spirituality, business and public service. The Millennia Co-op consists of several inter-connected projects, all centered in the Pomona Arts Colony. Each Millennia Co-op project provides opportunities for creative expression, employment and connecting in a healing community centered around Jesus."

Each Millennia Co-op project was designed to incorporate one or more of the four features we mention above.

Millennia art lounge: The Lounge was the Millennia Co-op's storefront project (literally). A street level store right on Second Street, converted into a performance space/dance venue hosting a weekly poetry night, live bands, hip-hop music, and house music events. All these regular events offered free or low cost and providing an alcohol-and drug-free space for a diverse group of young people to hang out and create community. The Millennia Lounge also hosted occasional art exhibitions as local artists, including the homeless, could gain exposure to their work and expression (note: proximity space, with an element of shared project).

Millennia art studio: This space offered beginning and experienced artists a place to create together in a community environment. Free studio space was available, as were art workshops and vocational training courses. The artists who used the studio (Christians and not-yet-Christians) occasionally took their work to the streets by producing murals and art installations to beautify the city. It's from the studio that much of the work for the exhibitions in the Lounge came (note: shared project and proximity space).

Millennia design group: Established in an open-plan office in a loft above the Lounge, the lab specialized in creative graphic designs that attracted customers from an assortment of businesses in Pomona and beyond. It produced business cards, websites, letterheads, and other business collateral (note: business enterprise).

Innerworld: Millennia's electronic dance culture collective, hosting a weekly house music event in the Lounge and also making a positive impact on the host community through projects like picking up trash and serving the homeless (note: shared project).

Millennia JiuJitsu: In the front of the basement under the Lounge, there were weekly jiujitsu wrestling classes promoting community relationships and personal fitness (note: business enterprise and proximity space).

Ichthus: At the core of the Millennia Co-op, an indigenous faith community called Ichthus. Originally one small group meeting in Brian Ollman's home, grew to three cell churches and continued to burgeon. Members of the church shared responsibility for several of the Millennia projects, and the leadership network (not elected, merely recognized) met regularly to consider the future direction of the mission. Those members of Ichthus that we met saw their involvement as that of missionaries. The people who came to Ichthus and then made a commitment to Christ were first accessed through the Lounge or jiujitsu or the Studio. In fact, some of those who came to Christ had been about as far from the church as Western kids could be.

We don't present the Pomona experiment as *the* way forward nor as the only expression of the missional church. It is *one* of the forms the missional church takes, and there will be as many forms as there are subcultures or people groups or neighborhoods to reach. And we applaud the courage, tenacity, and creativity shown by Brian and his team in getting something as effective as the Millennia Co-op launched. It was genuinely green space.

Incarnational, Messianic, Apostolic

What we propose is a reversing of the three mistakes made by the Christendom-mode church. The missional church, by its very nature, will be an anticlone of the existing traditional model. Rather than being primarily attractional, it will be incarnational. It will be willing to leave its own comfortable religious zones and live in direct contact with non-churchgoers, seeping into the host

culture like salt and light. It will be an infiltrating, transformational community. Second, rather than being dualistic, it will embrace a messianic spirituality. That is, a spirituality of engagement with culture and the world in the same mode as the Messiah himself. And third, the missional church will develop an apostolic form of leadership rather than the traditional hierarchical model.

We will explore each of these modes of being missional in the following three sections of this book. In fact, we prefer the term mode to that of model. We are not commending a new model at all. The church is surely tiring of the latest model being offered by church-growth theorists. As we just pointed out, the missional church will value diversity and should look significantly different depending on which subculture it has felt called to serve.