

## Toward a Missional Spirituality

Len Hjalmarson

"Today's church is in serious trouble.... I am suggesting that the 21st Century Church looks little like- and has far less power than- the church as it formed in Jerusalem in the Book of Acts.

"[Some] might say that the church is on the verge of some radical transformation. And so it must be if the church is to ever regain its power, its edge, its robust health, its life-changing and world-changing mission."<sup>1</sup>

My generation was raised with religious life revolving around buildings: a Temple spirituality. Buildings represent settled religion: they are immobile, lending themselves to predictable forms. It was a spirituality of the center, where religious life was influential and expected. It was a spirituality for the familiar places, well-traveled paths and a way of life that was not strongly in contrast to the dominant culture. It had an established priesthood, mostly well trained professionals<sup>2</sup> who did the spiritual work for us and dominated the action.

Temple spirituality was all about forms and gathered expression: it was a liturgical and cultic spirituality. Individual spirituality was primarily personal and inward, and its outward expression was secondary. It was dualistic: Monday to Saturday was secondary in comparison to Sunday, and the physical world was less real and less important than the spiritual world.

### A New Diaspora – Temple to Text

"A growing number of people are leaving the institutional church for a new reason. They are not leaving because they have lost their faith. They are leaving to preserve their faith."<sup>3</sup>

In the fall of 2000 my wife and I left our faith community and began a journey of discovery outside the walls. We found that the church and its roles and rituals looked very different from outside the institution. We realized how insular and isolated church culture had become. We had been so busy with other believers and attending events that we no longer had significant contact with non-Christians. After leaving we found time to get to know our neighbors.

The western church is experiencing a new *Diaspora*. Since 1991 the population in the United States has grown by 15%. During that same period of time the number of adults who do not attend church has grown from 38 million to 75 million... a 92% increase!<sup>4</sup> Barna's book "Revolution" documents these trends, and Barna estimates that the 30% of believers who are "churchless" today will expand to 70% in the next 20 years.<sup>5</sup> Western spirituality is moving away from buildings and become more eclectic. We are moving from Jerusalem to Antioch, and facing incredible challenges of translation as we look for a mobile

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counselors. *Christian Counseling Connection*, 2003, Issue 1

<sup>2</sup> See Alan Roxburgh's discussion of the evolution of the clergy in *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 190 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Reggie McNeal. *The Present Future* (Jossey Bass: San Francisco, CA : 2003). See also Alan Jamieson, "Ten Myths About Church Leavers," in *Reality Magazine*, March/April, 1999. [www.reality.org.nz](http://www.reality.org.nz)

<sup>4</sup> The Barna Group, *The Barna Update*, May, 2004. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org) Barna defines people as unchurched if they have not attended a Christian church service during the past six months, other than for special events such as weddings or funerals.

<sup>5</sup> George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale House, 2005)

spirituality – a spirituality of the road. As we lose the center ground,<sup>6</sup> we need a spirituality for exiles and a spirituality for the margins. As we lose the center ground, we need a spirituality of prophets rather than priests.<sup>7</sup>

We now live in a culture where authentic faith and Christian values are marginalized. Christianity is simply one option in a long list of options, and Christian leaders have lost their voice in the culture. The Temple culture, built on numbers, big budgets and large buildings, is increasingly isolated and defensive. As fear and uncertainty increase, and as familiar structures are threatened, our sense of isolation increases. The Temple will continue to exist until, like Israel in the desert, its generation passes on<sup>8</sup>, but for the emerging culture Temples will become an anachronism, a testament to a bygone era.

When Christianity moves from the center to the margins we have moved from temple to text, says Walter Brueggemann<sup>9</sup>. Those who recognize the irrelevance of Temple spirituality recognize at the same time the increased relevance of Scripture, and the increased need for a strong spiritual life. They have discovered that the priestly culture lacks the answers. As a result, exiles are no longer looking outside themselves, but are digging deeper within. They are learning a new dependence on the Spirit and the Word. As they listen and hear they become prophetic voices to the Church in times of transition.

*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.<sup>10</sup>*

Let's face it.. the Temple culture has its own attraction. The Temple is a safe place compared to the road. These are dangerous times, where we leave safe places and become pilgrims. In the Temple we know what to expect. Outside the Temple the roads are not well traveled, and frequently we are traveling off the map.<sup>11</sup>

Priests are for Temples, and prophets are people of the road.<sup>12</sup> As fixed places of worship become less important, the priestly caste itself is threatened. Priests live in Temples, where they can celebrate the cultic life. When the Temple is no longer at the center, the role of the Priest diminishes in favor of the Prophet.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Walter Brueggemann's fascinating discussion of "testimony as a decentered mode of preaching" in *Cadences of Home*, cited below.

<sup>7</sup> Other forces have pushed us to distrust institutions. Ulrich Beck in *Risk Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1992) describes the third phase in modernity as the move from structure to agency.

<sup>8</sup> McNeal, Op Cit. p.1. "The plug will be pulled when either the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty-five and older) or when the remaining ¾ of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both."

<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann. *Cadences of Home* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997) 108. Brueggemann writes, "While we may find wilderness-exile models less congenial, there is no biblical evidence that the God of the Bible cringes at the prospect of this community being one of wilderness and exile. Indeed this God resisted the temple in any case (cf. 2 Sam. 7:4-7). In the end, it is God and not the Babylonians who terminated the temple project. In the face of that possible eventuality in our own time and circumstances, the ways for the survival of an alternative imagination in an alternative community call for new strategies."

<sup>10</sup> Attributed to Hans Kung.

<sup>11</sup> This metaphor is apt. See Alan Roxburgh's recent series on *Missional Mapmaking* at [ALLELON](http://ALLELON.com).

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps one more application of Peter's quoting of Joel in Acts 2: we have become a prophethood of believers.

When travelers seek the road prophets have the advantage: they are already mobile. They tend not to rely on buildings or predictable forms. They are in touch with culture by definition of their mobility. They are already rubbing shoulders with change and they are friends of transition. Prophets, like John the Baptist, are comfortable with a degree of insecurity. Jesus “had nowhere to lay his head.”

As the center of authority moves from Jerusalem to Antioch and from Temple to text, from outward forms and places to inward awareness, authority itself is decentralized. Authority becomes less about position and role, and more about relationship and identity. We move from a narrow definition of priesthood, the Temple definition, to something more universal. We move from places of power to empowerment, from a method to a movement. What was tame and predictable becomes wild and dynamic.<sup>13</sup>

For all this change we need a spirituality of the road, a missional spirituality. This is a spirituality that is self-authorizing, decentralized, sacramental, personal, connected, creative, incarnational and storied. It is a spirituality for the road: a missional spirituality.

- Missional spirituality is self-authorizing and egalitarian. Priesthood is functional not positional: all are priests, all are sent Jn.17:18 (see Roland Allen *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*)<sup>14</sup>
- Missional spirituality is sacramental and decentralized. God is God of the journey. Moreover, God is at work all around us on the road. Every place is potentially sacred space.
- Missional spirituality is personal and immediate. We no longer rely on priests but on the Word and the Spirit. At the same time, we recognize the voice of God and kingdom vocation in others around us.
- Missional spirituality is connected and communal, not individualistic; it creates places of belonging; it values love and Spirit.
- Missional spirituality is mobile and incarnational. We take God with us; he is not limited to a sacred space where we must bring others.
- Missional spirituality is creative and innovative. We can't rely on fixed forms, and history doesn't hold every clue for the way forward. We become careful observers and attentive listeners.
- Missional spirituality is insecure and comfortable at the margins. We continually put ourselves at risk or cease to be relevant. It is wild and untamed and subversive.
- Missional spirituality is storied and poetic. It is connected to the larger sweep of God's kingdom building work in history. It values beauty and the imagination as places where God makes himself known. It embraces non-rational means of knowing.
- Missional spirituality is present/future; it lives in the tension of now and not yet, but recognizes that the reign of God is breaking into the world in Jesus Christ.
- Missional spirituality is cruciform; it sacrifices personal comfort and security for the sake of the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>13</sup> See John Eldridge, *Wild at Heart* as well as Richard Rohr, *Adams' Return* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006)

<sup>14</sup> See also Frank Viola, *Who Is Your Covering?* Present Testimony Ministry, 1999. The point is that Jesus authorizes church planting; we don't need human authorization to do this, though we should expect confirmation from a community of friends. The “covering” doctrine has been a means of institutional control and maintenance, and has not been generally used to advance the kingdom. However, missional spirituality is not individualistic or antinomian. See the discussion in *Missional Church* p. 150.

## From the Center to the Margins: From Security to Insecurity

Human beings don't naturally embrace insecurity and change. When Moses led the people of God out of slavery, their strongest inclination was not to go forward but to go back!

Remember the movie "Chicken Run?"

"In a tragic scene, she [Ginger] is trying to share her vision and stir up another escape attempt when she realizes that most of her fellow hens have no concept of freedom. For them, this is the way it has always been. Why try and change it, when, as one hapless chicken claims, "This is a chicken's lot -- to lay eggs then die." Ginger is a real hero because she refuses to give in to the prevailing consciousness of the prison camp. She's a prophet and visionary and a darn good leader. At risk of her life and by enduring incarceration and suffering she eventually succeeds in organizing the most daring escape by building the most extraordinary flying machine... Without being too dramatic, this is precisely what is needed for missional leaders and radical disciples who know that the urgency of the day requires a significant shift from the predominant image of "church."<sup>15</sup>

How do we survive the transition from Temple to text, from the center to the margins? How do we become a people free from addiction to the culture, even addiction to church culture, living out on the open range, a people comfortable with the inherent insecurity of freedom?

A couple of years back someone gave me a copy of Margaret Wheatley's article, "Goodbye Command and Control." An insightful look at shifting paradigms, this was one gem I found there:

"Whenever we're trying to change a deeply structured belief system, everything in life is called into question - our relationships with loved ones, children, and colleagues; our relationships with authority and major institutions.. Those who have led their organizations into new ways of organizing often say that the most important change was what occurred in themselves. *Nothing would have changed in their organizations if they hadn't changed..*"<sup>16</sup>

Wheatley helps us understand why it is so HARD to explain why we need change. We can have some ideas about the need for change, and we may think we even understand a new place without being there... but we are deluded. Looking at the map gives you no real experience of the Grand Canyon. The map is not the territory.<sup>17</sup> Not until you step outside your normal world or practices into a new world and new practices do you learn new questions, new truths and see things you never saw before. All your senses become engaged, and then even your self-understanding will change.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Massachusetts, PA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003) 147.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Wheatley. *Goodbye Command and Control*. In *Leader to Leader*, No. 5, Summer, 1997. Jossey-Bass Publishers. Her website [Margaret Wheatley](#).

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer's discussion of maps is helpful. See "'Pilgrim's Digress,'" in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005) 85-88.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Kuhn coined the phrase "paradigm shift" to describe the process of fundamental change in perspective. John Caputo provides an excellent summary in *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006) 47-49.

Consider the building of the Temple in the Old Testament. Before the Temple existed, God instituted a tabernacle (which was actually a tent). The Mosaic tabernacle was assembled at the command of the Lord to Moses: "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex.25: 8). The core idea was God's habitation with His people. The physical space symbolized the Presence and anchored that Presence in the real world of taste, touch, sight and sound.

If the physical reality of the tent and its furnishings symbolized God's Presence, the mobility of the tabernacle symbolized God's dynamic nature, and His desire for flexibility and faithfulness on the part of His people. Israel literally *followed* the Lord.

*"17 And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel encamped. 18 At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they encamped; as long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp.... 22 Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out; but when it was taken up they set out. 23 At the command of the LORD they encamped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses. Numbers 9:18-23 (RSV)*

So the tabernacle was flexible, impermanent, and mobile but the later temple in Jerusalem was fixed and immovable. The tabernacle was God's idea, but the temple was David's idea. God sent word to David:

*"Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the Judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 7: 5-7).*

God allowed the temple to be built, but not by David. David made the preparations, and Solomon did the building. In contrast to the tabernacle, the blueprint did not come from Mt. Sinai. God was not the architect this time.

The tabernacle – or tent - was the more accurate symbol of the Presence of God with his people, a pilgrim God with a pilgrim people. The Temple, in contrast, was an accommodation that the Lord never wanted, and partly explains Israel's problems with idolatry. Inevitably, Israel began to trust in the symbol over the reality. They began to believe that nothing could happen to them so long as Temple worship continued (Jeremiah 7). It took the exile for them to begin to understand that God "does not dwell in buildings made with hands." The New Testament moves us an even greater distance from Temple based religion where God's people become the living stones.<sup>19</sup>

### Church Which is Not the Church

Today we have "churches" which are not the church, since the *ekklesia* is a people. When we build our expressions of faith around buildings, our imagination becomes bound to our

---

<sup>19</sup> And in John 1 we hear a radical new connection of tent and incarnation when the "Word became flesh and tented among us," or more dynamically, "entered our neighborhood" (The Message).

symbols. In the end, buildings create us in their image. We lose our flexibility, and our ability to respond to change. We become dependent on priests and human leaders. The medium is the message and we learn passivity in large theatre-like settings.<sup>20</sup>

We say, "The Temple of the Lord!" (Jeremiah 7) but our buildings and programs do not depend on what God is doing; they remain in place whether God continues to ordain them or not. We can't risk closing or selling a Temple because we have a mortgage and priests to support. In an interview at Next Wave Neil Cole responded,

Fruit inspection is not a bad thing. However, we need to be asking the right questions. The numbers of people can be deceptive. You can have many people and not be fruitful. You might just be putting on a better show than the guy around the corner. What we are looking for is fruitfulness.. we don't care if our churches live a year, twenty years, or a hundred years. We care that while they live, they give birth... That is a success. We think that if every church reproduces in that way, then the Kingdom of God will continue and grow.<sup>21</sup>

The inertia of large buildings is often like the cruise ship traveling at 25 knots; God cannot quickly take us in new directions. George Barna's research demonstrates that God is allowing Temple religion to fall down while raising up small tribes of people who are flexible, who are less tied to human leaders or tradition, and who are not afraid to venture to unknown places.<sup>22</sup> Jim Peterson writes,

*Our temples are territorial. They cause us to ask questions about "who is in" and "who is out," and to worry about the other temple down the road lest they gain more adherents than us. They support competition and division in the Body. They cause us to dwell in fear and to regard people as our possessions instead of the Lord's.*<sup>23</sup>

On the morning of February 4th, 2000 I was reading in Nehemiah and Ezra, thinking about the church in the new millennium. The Lord was helping me pull some pieces together when I had to leave to meet some friends for coffee.

I drove to Nick's home and picked him up, and he began telling me about a dream that another friend's nine year old son had had early this same morning. The boy's actual name was Joshua.

In his dream Joshua was standing outside a church building and God was standing beside him. God spoke to Joshua and told him that the temple had to be destroyed because the people were not worshipping the true God; they were worshipping other things.

---

<sup>20</sup> See David Fitch discussion of this in *The Great Giveaway*. Fitch describes two sorts of worship environments in evangelical churches: the lecture hall and the rock concert (theatre?). The first setting is designed to stimulate thinking and personal reflection, and the latter is designed to produce feeling. The "lecture hall" setting deals with humans in a modern and Enlightenment fashion: individuals are capable of acquiring truths through propositions and words, and this will somehow lead to transformation. The "rock concert" and pep-rally setting is questioned because it is not generally shaped by a theology grounded in holiness, while at the same time the forces of culture industries act as technologies of desire (103). Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Next Wave Online, November, 2005

<sup>22</sup> Barna describes micro-movements and distributed faith models as the fastest growing forms in the west. Op Cit. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Petersen. *Church Without Walls*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress: 1992. See also Neil Cole, *Organic Church*.

God told Joshua to kick the temple with his heel. Before he did so, Joshua yelled at the people inside, warning them about what was going to happen. Some began running out of the temple, but there were some that stayed in the temple and who wouldn't come out. Joshua then kicked the wall. The people who remained inside were standing under their idols when the temple started to collapse. Joshua saw the idols that they had made fall on the people and crush their heads.

The Lord is moving His people out of Temples and back to the highway. Before I stood outside the inherited church<sup>24</sup> I didn't understand the meaning of the movement from tabernacle to Temple. I had read some things about change and about religious culture, but always missed the heart of it. I was like a Martian trying to understand green grass. Once you've seen it, tasted it, smelled it and rolled in it... you know what green grass really is.

### From the Temple to the Wilderness

*"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."*<sup>25</sup>

The tabernacle was built for the wilderness, and the wilderness is a metaphor for danger. It is a place of sudden changes in weather, a place of animals and bandits, unpredictable and wild. The spirituality of the Temple will never carry us through the wilderness, and the wild places are where we need to be as we reach toward the city we haven't seen. In the introduction to *Small Group Leadership as Spiritual Direction*, Eugene Peterson writes,

"William Stafford... an American poet... writes of people who 'want a wilderness with a map.' We think we want God beyond our understanding so we can worship largely, God sovereign in all our circumstances and suffering so we can be cared for securely, the God of Paul's exclamatory, 'How searchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Rom. 11:33). But then we get nervous about the "unsearchable" and the "inscrutable." We hesitate; maybe that's just a little too much mystery. We hesitate, get cold feet, pull back. We want a 'wilderness with a map.'<sup>26</sup>

A spirituality for exiles is predicated on insecurity because we no longer need outward points of reference... buildings, rituals or even necessarily designated leaders.<sup>27</sup> We live in spirit and in truth, and we share a common Leader. It's a subversive spirituality, a communal spirituality and a spirituality of emergence. As Walter Brueggemann put it,

"A new church means reformulating the faith in radical ways in the midst of a community that has to begin again. For Ezra, as for Moses, new church starts do not aim at strategies for success, but at strategies for survival of an alternative community. *What must survive is not simply the physical community; what must survive is an alternative community.*"<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> See Stuart Murray who divides ekklesial expressions into two broad categories of emergent or inherited. Murray admits that this distinction has limited use and is not an either/or expression. *Church After Christendom* (London: Paternoster Press, 2005)

<sup>25</sup> Antoine de Saint Exupery, source unknown.

<sup>26</sup> Heather Web, *Small Group Leadership as Spiritual Direction* (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Canada, 2005)

<sup>27</sup> See Dallas Willard and Linda Cannell, "The Unnecessary Leader," Regent College Audio series.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 108.

The subversive community's mission is not to bring the kingdom of God from without; we can't stand apart from the culture in comfortable groups. We can't hope to be merely attractational and encourage people to come in. We must be among; we must release the kingdom of God from within. Subversives live and do their work 'undercover' where the world lives and breathes. Their goal is not escapism (trying to build a Christian utopia), but to show people how they can lay hold of life as God intended, in his Kingdom. Eugene Petersen comments about subversion that, "the status quo is wrong and must be overthrown if the world is going to be livable. It is so deeply wrong that repair work is futile. The world is, in the word insurance agents use to designate our wrecked cars, totaled."<sup>29</sup>

Let's face it, we don't arrive at these places without pain and struggle. We aren't going to get there if we are still sitting in a traditional Sunday gathering, smiling at the back of other heads week by week. Transformation happens in furnaces, not in clean and brightly lit foyers.

When the culture is in transition, confusion reigns.<sup>30</sup> Even casual conversations can become complex, with people using language in very different ways. "Church" and "evangelism" and even "Christian" carry baggage they didn't once possess. We struggle for definition, even reacting against it. Moving from a Baptist gathering to an E Free gathering becomes a cross-cultural experience, even within the same town.

Liminality is the classical term for this place. It is emptiness and nowhere. Adolescence is the liminal space between childhood and adulthood. But liminality is more than a point along the way to somewhere else. It represents anti-structure to structure, chaos to order. The place between two world views is a liminal place. It is a place of dying and rebirth, even of metamorphosis, the place where the caterpillar spins its cocoon and disappears from view. Liminality is Israel in the desert, Jesus in the tomb.

*Reality is that place between the sea and the foam.* Irish Proverb

The Latin word *limina* means threshold. Liminality is where all transformation happens. It is when we are betwixt and between, and therefore by definition "not in control." Nothing new happens as long as we are inside our self-constructed comfort zone. Much of our day to day effort at life is toward maintaining our personal little world. Richard Rohr comments that,

"Nothing good or creative emerges from business as usual. This is why much of the work of God is to get people into liminal space, and to keep them there long enough so they can learn something essential. It is the ultimate teachable space.. maybe the only one. Most spiritual giants try to live lives of "chronic liminality" in some sense. They know it is the only position that insures ongoing wisdom, broader perspective and ever-deeper compassion. The Jewish prophets... St. Francis, Gandhi, and John the Baptist come to mind."<sup>31</sup>

Apart from personal transformation we are likely to simply become a new problem. The head answer may be right, but the soul is not. As Rohr put it, "The need to be in power, to have control, and to say someone else is wrong is not enlightenment. There's nothing new about that. That's the old paradigm We need less reformation and more transformation."<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993)

<sup>30</sup> Alan Roxburgh in *The Sky is Falling*, following Ulrich Beck, speaks of "discontinuous change" and references in particular the challenges for leaders. (Eagle: ACI Publishing, 2005)

<sup>31</sup> Richard Rohr. "Days Without Answers in a Narrow Space." National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 2002

<sup>32</sup> Richard Rohr. *Everything Belongs* (New York, NY: Crossroad Books, 2000)

## The New Subversives

While some will act as subversives, others will embrace revolution. There are those around us who need encouragement to leave the safe places and move into transition; it is too easy to sit back and let others take the risk. Frost and Hirsch advocate encouraging holy dissatisfaction:

"One of the great weapons in the revolutionary leader's arsenal is to cultivate a sense of holy dissatisfaction -- to provoke a basic discontent with what is and so awaken a desire to move toward what could be... We must not be afraid to be unpopular, to be seen as revolutionaries, if we want to really effect the missional-incarnational paradigm in our time. The real revolutionary, or perhaps the only one, is the person who has nothing left to lose. Rub the discontent raw and then throw salt on it -- our times are urgent.." <sup>33</sup>

We will have to become comfortable working on the margins. The main force of the church in society today is the group who inhabit the large and visible Temples. These Temples are like cruise ships in a narrow channel.. the force of their ponderous movement through the water draws many smaller vessels in their wake. Trying to move against that flow can seem hopeless and futile. We can't turn those huge ships around.. some are traveling on engines that no longer run, but the force of an ocean liner in motion remains substantial.

The religious climate of Jesus day was little different. The main spring of religious culture unwound slowly and inexorably; Jesus life and teaching were at the margins, with marginalized people. Did he know something we don't know?

"Change agents are more likely to be pioneering church planters who have no congregational history to deal with and who are immersed in the cultures of the people they endeavor to reach." <sup>34</sup>

"We need to watch the margins of our society - the inner cities and the rural areas where creative approaches are emerging, often born in despair. And so when desperation forces us to let go of the old ways, God can bring new life." <sup>35</sup>

Change is unlikely to come from the established priesthood, who have a vested interest in maintaining the life of the Temple. Change will come in small ways, but like leaven in a lump, it will grow in force and in power.

When the Gospel first went from Jerusalem to Antioch, the Temple began to lose place as the center of Messianic faith. The *diaspora* we are seeing in our own day, with increasing numbers of believers not claiming any traditional church institution as their home, is divinely orchestrated by God to take us from a member-centered club to a missional-incarnational movement. We need to support that transition and the hunger for authenticity even as we encourage a new dependence on God and a 24/7 life of discipleship outside traditional forms.

We need leaders who will sacrifice their personal advancement to inspire the risk and sacrifice necessary to bring change.<sup>36</sup> These leaders are not the celebrities and pragmatists

---

<sup>33</sup> Frost and Hirsch, Op Cit. 192

<sup>34</sup> Eddie Gibbs. *Churchnext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2000)

<sup>35</sup> Anne Wilkerson-Hayes. *New Ways of Being the Church*. GOCN Vol.13, No.2, June, 2001, 7.

we have seen rise in great numbers in our own time, but rather are “heroic” leaders. Richard Quebedeaux writes that with the foundations of society, including the family, crumbling we need a new kind of leader to show us the way to the abundant life:

. No medium or method of conveying the Christian gospel can meet people's basic needs for recognition, involvement, worthiness, growth, and indeed salvation itself without the loving give and take of person-to-person interaction over a long period of time. This is what community really means, and this is exactly where popular religion and its leaders are not successful. The church, therefore, does need to become God's ideal family.. [and] the battle against authoritarianism is the consequence of leadership without love.<sup>37</sup>

I have at least implied that we need less authority and fewer human leaders. That would be a “thin” reading and requires comment that raises new questions, but they are worth asking. In *Missional Church* Inagrace Dietterich writes that the modern emphasis on the autonomous self too often ignores the formative power of the various communities in which we participate. She references Robert Bellah and associates, who conclude in *Habits of the Heart* that this view is “based on inadequate social science, improvised philosophy, and vacuous theology.” They assert:

“We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions, but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our activity goes on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

## Memory, Community and God's Future

The “poetic and storied” nature of missional spirituality describes the connection to memory. In Scripture we are constantly reminded of our identity as a *covenant people*. In times of exile we face the unique danger of loss of memory and loss of community. In that void, we are apt to believe the promises of the Empire to give us a home, to bring us security, to provide meaning and to offer unlimited consumption in an eternal Now. Who needs memory when life is so good today? Who needs community when we have everything we need?

“Tell all his wonderful acts,” is more than a simple refrain in David's song (1 Chron. 16:9b); it is the fundamental work of the people (*liturgia*). Apart from memory we have no stories and without stories we have no identity. Lacking identity we have no way to renew covenant, and no way to move forward as a people. And we must renew covenant, because we continually compromise and falter and fail.

“Only through the practice of memory will new possibility emerge. Without some form of memory, this sentence you are reading would make no sense... Without memory we become imprisoned in an absolute present, unaware of the direction we have come from, and therefore what direction we are heading in. Without memory there can be

---

<sup>37</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *By What Authority* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) 177-179. We need to radically challenge the leadership thinking that is a legacy of the Enlightenment and business world. Peter Senge, Drath and Paulus, Margaret Wheatley and others exploring new directions can help us.

<sup>38</sup> *Missional Church*, 150.

no momentum, no discernible passage of time, and therefore no movement or velocity..."<sup>39</sup>

All these things come together in the New Testament at the Lord's Table. The story of Passover is brought into the present, and the memories of deliverance and the hope for a just future become one story. *"This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this in memory of Me."*

Some may already be on board the large ships, but are not tempted by the rewards offered by the system. We need dreamers and visionaries who understand how dangerous a dream can be. We need people who are comfortable with the margins, with smallness, with ambiguity, and with obscurity. Frost and Hirsch note that "It is this capacity to articulate a preferred future based on a common moral vision that allows people to dream again.." <sup>40</sup>

*All people dream, but not equally.  
Those who dream by night,  
in the dusty recesses of their minds,  
wake in the day to find that it was vanity.  
But the dreamers of the day are dangerous,  
for they may act their dreams with open eyes  
to make it possible.*

T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

We need, like Jesus, to inspire a vision of real freedom founded in love.

We aren't going to move forward by designing new programs. We are no longer in Jerusalem where religious understanding is long established and commonly shared. There is no longer a single religious center to our culture, even as the interest in spirituality increases. Instead, we have many tribes and great diversity of thought.

Does this mean that "place" is unimportant?<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, context and contextualization are more important than ever. Buildings are in, but not as Christian clubs.

One of the incarnational efforts we are seeing locally is a pub church. Others include parties and bbqs where believers can mix casually with unbelievers. This kind of initiative by believers.. community centers, pub churches, gatherings of people around special interests like hiking or biking.. are likely to result in believers mixing with non-believers in new and effective ways, and new impact for the gospel. A century ago Roland Allen wrote,

"If we, toiling under the burden of our organizations, sigh for that spontaneous freedom of expanding life it is because we see in it something divine, something in its very nature profoundly efficient, something which we would gladly recover, something which the elaboration of our modern machinery obscures and deadens and kills." <sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 56.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 209

<sup>41</sup> To argue against the importance of place would be to discard the incarnation. Eugene Peterson argues convincingly for place in his recent work *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2005) 71-72.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Allen. *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (London: World Dominion Press, 1927)

## CONCLUSION

Frost and Hirsch comment in a footnote that, "if we aim at ministry, we seldom get to do much mission. But if we aim at mission, we have to do ministry because ministry is the means by which mission is achieved. The established church has generally got this wrong."<sup>43</sup>

The direction of this article has not been missions *per se* and we haven't spent much time on form, but the hope of a new spirituality to support a biblical vision. As Temple religion dies, and as believers increasingly mix with unbelievers in outside-the-walls contexts, conversations and conversions will happen. *Belonging will precede believing. Conversations will root new communities.* The church will expand, and will increasingly move from a ministry oriented culture to a missional culture. We need to support these missional-incarnational efforts by encouraging faithful, self-authorizing tribes and communities and decentralized networks that support innovative kingdom cultures.<sup>44</sup>

But how do we gather non-traditional believers and move them forward? Under what banner will they be organized? We do not need an organized apostolic structure.<sup>45</sup> Rather, new communities will arise in the Name of Jesus, around the spontaneous organization that comes from the vision that takes root as they are obedient to the Holy Spirit. These new communities need support and encouragement, but not centralized control. They need to find ways to gather that encourages participation and supports their unique expression of kingdom life.

Friendship is a critical part of the journey forward. In order to embrace the new we have to grieve the loss of the old. Few of us are capable of doing that work alone: grief requires community and friendship.<sup>46</sup>

Imagination and learning require friendship. One of the wonderful things about the Internet is the way it allows people to connect in relatively non-threatening environments. As we discover that we are not alone on this insecure journey, we become more ok with insecurity. This increased level of comfort actually empowers us to explore transitional places more deeply. We increase the power of our learning and discovery, even as we multiply it among friends.

Community is not limited to geographical boundaries. Rosemary Neave comments on the power of networks that,

"Networks move us beyond isolated bursts of creativity and life to see patterns emerging, and perhaps inspire others to make links and get involved. Many

---

<sup>43</sup> Op Cit.

<sup>44</sup> For Alan Roxburgh's discussion of missional leadership, see chapter 7 in Darrel L. Guder, Ed. *Missional Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998)

<sup>45</sup> We do not need a new Apostolic Reformation to accomplish this. I do not agree with Peter Wagner, Bill Hamon, Donald McGavran and others on this point. While I believe in the apostolic gifting, I do not believe it is a governmental gift and its authority is relational not institutional. Unfortunately, when our institutions begin to fall apart, we respond with fear and a need for control. Much of the talk of apostolic authority and church growth is founded on these human insecurities rather than on God's initiative. It is, in essence, an extension and tweaking of an old paradigm and not the birth of a new one.

<sup>46</sup> This begs the question of leadership models again. I have made an attempt to catalog some new directions in my article, "Kingdom Leadership in the Postmodern World" available at [Nextreformation.com](http://Nextreformation.com).

[emerging] groups are small and fragile.. networking helps them see themselves as part of a larger picture.." <sup>47</sup>

At the end of their seminal work, Frost and Hirsch talk about herding cats. No one who has ever tried this has experienced much success! They note that cats, unlike cattle, are fiercely independent. But cats always know where the food dish is. If we recognize the hunger for experience, the hunger to know God, and the hunger to be connected authentically in community, and if we create places where these hungers can be met, we can gather tribes of people and assist them in moving forward.

Finally, instead of sending new converts to a central location for nurture (Jerusalem, John 4), we need to encourage them to sink wells where they live. An infinite water source is available wherever Jesus is.

*VENI, Sancte Spiritus,  
reple tuorum corda fidelium,  
et tui amoris in eis ignem accende.* <sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Neave, Rosemary. "Reimagining the Church." Study Leave Report for the Women's Resource Center. Waipu, NZ, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> COME, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.