

**Crossing Social and Cultural Barriers for The Gospel:
Characteristics Of 'Apostolicity' In The Bible, Early Church And For Today**

By

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Abstract

Statistics confirm that younger generations are leaving the church, yet many Christ-centered congregations lack solutions. The purpose of this project is to explore how a renewed understanding of ‘apostolicity’ can bridge social and cultural divides. The three samples of this study will include two movements (one ancient, one contemporary) and one local church. In addition, there is a biblical-theological overview of ‘apostolicity’ (with focused exegesis of Ephesians 4 and Acts 17). Discoveries will yield strengths, weaknesses and questions for future discussion.

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CHAPTER 1—THE NEED TO RECOVER ‘APOSTOLIC’ MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

Stating The Problem

Recent headlines tell a story: “Young Adults Aren’t Sticking with Church”; “Why Millennials are Leaving the Church”; “The Missing Generation in Our Churches.” A recent Pew Research Center survey confirms that “one-in-four members of the Millennial generation...are unaffiliated with any particular faith...more unaffiliated than members of Generation X...(20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers.”¹ These statistics are not simply about younger generations, they are concerning the future of the Church—a wake-up call for Western Christianity. Culture is changing rapidly, yet Christians seem unaware of such shifts or lack understanding how to reverse falling tides of isolation between the Church and the culture in which it exists.

Furthermore, many congregations who desire to share the gospel lack meaningful access to, and rapport with, those outside their faith community;² the heart to reach out is there, but essential components *how* to reach people, hide in obscurity. Previous methods of attracting the unchurched which were effective in previous generations, are perceivably, less effective today. Christians who have a burden to see loved ones, friends, neighbors and others reached for Christ, talk less about opportunities and more about differences with these same people. Thus, churches become insular and the chasm widens.

¹ Allison Pond, Gregory Smith, and Scott Clement, “Religion Among the Millennials,” *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, 17 February 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>

² For the duration of this paper I will operate with the assumption that one of the Church’s primary mandates is to reach the unchurched—whether they be Christian or not. This thesis will prefer the term “unchurched”, versus pejorative terms such as “unsaved”, “unbelievers”, “lost”, etc.

This thesis considers the following problem statement: Many Christ-centered churches lack ‘apostolic’ ministry that is socially viable and culturally relevant (to real and perceived concerns), therefore a divide exists between them, and those they desire to reach. What is needed is a recovery of the ‘apostolic’ gifting within the Church. A more thorough definition of the term ‘apostolic’ is provided on (pp. 12-15); for now we could summarize apostolicity as a gift that allows one to successfully bridge social, cultural and spiritual divides between the Church and the unchurched.

The Ministry Context

Who Does This Concern?

This cultural divide has become apparent within my own congregation, The River Anglican Church (hereafter, “The River”). Several who attend the church have replaced their unchurched friendships with friendships at church. Those who still maintain relationships with the unchurched often feel they lack sufficient religious credentials or adequate biblical knowledge to be effective for the gospel. My experience is that these are not the most significant barriers; the real barriers are social and cultural in nature. This problem developed into a question: “How can bridges be built, spanning chasms which are social and cultural in nature?”

Where Is The Problem?

Within the last six years The River has grown from 30 attendees to over 200. It is a multi-generational family with an equal division of those aged between 18 and 30, and 30 and 55 (the same rough division exists between married and single, and student to non-student).

There is an excitement about the church's uniqueness in the community. A majority at The River are conservative in their theological core, yet appear "liberal" in comparison with other Christians in the Southwestern Virginia bible-belt. Most River attendees who are not *in* college are college graduates with a large number possessing masters and doctoral degrees. The general feel of the congregation is blue-jean friendly, informal, relaxed and politically mixed; most have no background in Anglicanism. In terms of worship, the Sunday morning service is musically blended;³ digital slides are projected for songs and liturgy (hard-copies of the *Book of Common Prayer* are not used, simply the liturgy thereof) with Communion weekly in a liturgically "low church" atmosphere.⁴

The River is located in Blacksburg, Virginia, a comfortable community of 20,000 people with a student population of 26,000—a town that is shadowed by the College at Virginia Tech. Permanent residents are heavily influenced by the values of the College which emphasizes tolerance, equality of all types and spiritual inclusion.⁵ Blacksburg has an emphasis on education, sports, safety and locally-supported businesses, with a vocal minority who resist the style of cultural evangelicalism that many other churches in the area gravitate towards.

When Did This Problem Occur?

The problem of its congregational identity, confidence and missional effectiveness has existed since The River's early years; the founding pastor left after 18 months and an interim pastor assisted for almost two years until my hire. Like a child that grows up in a troubled and

³ The term "blended" is often used to describe worship which combines contemporary choruses and hymns.

⁴ People often distinguish between what some call "high churches" versus "low churches"; the former typically have a good deal of liturgy, a ceremonial formality, and use of symbols. This would not describe The River's weekly service, though it would describe a small number of special services throughout the year.

⁵ As a result of Virginia Tech's presence (which includes ethnic diversity), there is clear resistance against a religion's claim to have *the* truth, especially Christianity.

insecure home, the congregation started with a weak sense of missional identity and purpose that continues to this day.

Another important factor has been the River's progress through three stages: survival, success and eventually, significance. After my arrival (six years ago), we began to work for our *survival*: moving facilities twice, changing the worship style to be more informal, and challenging several members who were toxic and disruptive.⁶

As a result of these changes, eventually our numbers (and giving) increased; the question changed from survival to one of *success*; improving what we offered as a church. In response, we hired additional staff (a volunteer coordinator, university student minister and administrative assistant), strengthening areas such as worship, discipleship and outreach. Once again numbers grew, leading to a decision in the summer of 2014 to change facilities to where we are now.

The River's present location is a beautiful century-old downtown Blacksburg church, seating over 300 people and aligning aesthetically with our Anglican heritage (it has a three-story high ceiling that is covered in natural wood, with an expansive balcony). This latest move has also created additional numeric growth, added two key staff positions (a youth minister and director of discipleship), expanded important programs such as children's ministry and adult education, marking an important transition from success to *significance*.⁷

As mentioned earlier the question of significance arose because though we have grown numerically (and financially) by attracting those who are already looking for a church home, there is a deep realization this has not been through reaching the unchurched and not involved a

⁶ During this interim stage, there was no one in authority who could stand up to people who were operating in unhealthy and ungodly ways. Therefore one of the first goals we set was to challenge these individuals to change, or leave. Some changed and stayed, and others left.

⁷ There is a predictable trend in churches-though they grow in attendees and giving, they can often do so with little effect on the unchurched community around them; they become popular and grow, but still lack impact, apostolically-speaking.

significant impact on the community around us. For this reason, the discovery of apostolic characteristics is essential for our future significance.

How Has This Problem Harmed People And Ministry?

There have been several levels of harm because of this lapse in mission. As a result of a growth of insularity, River members (in large part) have lost their passion, concern, and confidence to build bridges with those outside of The church. As we have grown, the demands of programs and ministries have taken more of people's time; we have become less involved in our community and comfortable not having to share the gospel within that insularity, than if we were living amongst the unchurched. Programs designed to reach people outside of the church have come and gone with minimal effectiveness.⁸ Little of what we do appears to fit a larger vision for who we are reaching or how we are reaching them. God has not received due glory, His love and justice have not been adequately known, nor the Kingdom of God expanded in par with the potential that exists.

This came to mind when meeting recently with a parishioner who was struggling with basic questions about the Bible, and other religions. What concerned me was not his questions, as much as his perception that our ministry—which included also a direct reference to my preaching and teaching—made him feel ashamed to ask questions that cut across the grain of the *status quo*. Through this conversation and other similar ones, a realization has emerged that we are out of touch with many in our church who hide behind their own questions and struggles.

⁸ At one of our outreach events last year, the number of attendees was strong; however there was an obvious lack of people who had been invited from outside of our fellowship.

Why does This Matter Enough To Study?

The River has several members who are comfortable moving in the community in ways that would be respected and welcomed by the unchurched: they love the outdoors, recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, climbing, motorcycle riding and martial arts; several live very healthy and organic lifestyles, which is popular in Blacksburg, enjoy local pubs and bars, and are involved at Virginia Tech as students, faculty and staff.

As a result, opportunities exist today for Christians at The River to reach the unchurched in creative, entrepreneurial and indigenous ways as individuals, teams and our communities work together. Avenues exist in the marketplace, workplace and community hubs such as gyms, coffee-shops and pubs. Therefore, The River is well poised to reach those outside of the church.

This project will help expose me to beliefs and practices of those who effectively reaching the unchurched. Preaching and teaching on research findings will in turn, challenge false views.⁹ This study will open me up to what others are doing in Anglican churches in several different cities. Moreover on a personal note, I feel most alive when I am out in the community interacting with the unchurched (as opposed to being weighed down by administration and even, pastoral care). Thus, my prayer is that this study will revive my heart and strengthen my mind, so I will more passionately and skillfully lead in mission.

⁹ False views include separatism, universalism, accommodation, domination, anti-nomianism and Gnosticism, to name a few.

Statement Of Objectives

In pursuing the research, there were five major objectives. The first concerned writing questions for leaders and laity in the local church, conducting on site interviews and notating responses.

The purpose was to discover ‘apostolic’ beliefs and practices, which are active in the local church. The responses from these interviews are presented in chapter 4.

The second objective concerned the discovery of ‘apostolic’ beliefs and practices, through a thorough biblical-theological study of the Old and New Testaments. This included not only a broad look at the Pentateuch, but the prophets, Israel, and elaborate exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16 and Acts 17:16-34. This work is presented in chapter 2.

A third objective regarded the study of the Celtic Christian movement under St. Patrick. The intention was to research and present a historical example with important theological insights regarding missional practices among the unchurched, as well to offer a historical parallel to contemporary examples. This materials is reflected in chapter 3.

A fourth objective was to overview the Missional Church Movement, so that the characteristics of a local church could be understood within the perspective of a broader Movement, and also so that St. Patrick could be viewed in comparison to a contemporary one. This material seemed to reside best before an analysis of the local church interviews in chapter 4.

The fifth objective concerned analysis of the material in chapters 2-4.

As a final note, these objectives differ from that of my thesis proposal, which was submitted in the summer of 2013. Since that time (and the completion of ethnographic studies), a lot has been learned, changing the questions and research portion. This is explained in more detail on pages 140-141.

Conceptual Framework

Candidate's Interests And Abilities

My first formative experiences related to the topic at hand, was 17 years ago while living in Florida. It was there my wife and I befriended two individuals in their twenties who were interested in pursuing Jesus and attending our local church. However, these two, and some others in their age group, had a very difficult experience connecting with others in our church, eventually leaving church altogether.¹⁰ What perplexed us was that their lack of connection with the church wasn't theological, but a lack of ability to translate spirituality into their world. Equally discouraging to us was the fact that they were clearly misunderstood (and in fact, dismissed) by others in the church.

Through this process it became clear to us that there was a generation—if not an entire group of people (across generations)—who were disconnecting with the church and largely misunderstood by evangelical Christians. Many subsequent experiences occurred, primarily (but not exclusively) with younger generations. Moving eventually to Colorado for several years, then North Carolina, we experimented with different ways of 'doing church' with many people who were rejecting mainstream evangelicalism: We had house groups (with over 20 people), we hosted seeker studies, neighborhood gatherings, formed a band which played in local establishments, and began to disciple what we would eventually see as spiritually interested, but institutionally skeptical people. They were hungry to connect with God and other Christians, but disinterested from a connecting with most evangelical churches. We could not understand the larger picture (the "why?" question); at that time, most writers were explaining differences in terms of demographics (Generation X, Y, Millennials, etc.). However, what was so new fifteen

¹⁰ For example: they found the typical Bible study approach boring; they had different questions than others when discussing truth and different beliefs on the source and scope of truth; they had different concerns and passions than the others, etc.

years ago, went far beyond mere generational differences, to social, cultural and spiritual changes that were happening in the ways of relating between the church and unchurched.

Throughout this time, my wife and I continued through a difficult process of asking very basic questions about the nature, calling and relationship between church culture and unchurched culture. We began to struggle with the lack of missional vibrancy and effectiveness of the church, eventually making the decision to leave ministry in the church, and join the Navigators “20something” division. However, that was not far enough so we left ministry altogether. We were curious what life would be like being “normal people”, involved in a vocation that was entirely unrelated to a church or Christianity. Soon, we resigned from the Navigators and stopped attending a local church altogether.

We eventually decided to purchase and manage a Café (combined coffee-bar, pub and restaurant) in Durham, North Carolina. This four-year period was one of the most difficult, and helpful, for our understanding of the church, and mission; we experienced blessings and curses as we lived our lives, largely outside of any faith community, utilizing micro-enterprise as a way of living among the unchurched. We were awestruck by the gospel we saw happening outside of the church, as we were also equally compromised by the evil in it. This phase taught us the importance of the church, as well as how critical it is for Christians to be living *among* the unchurched, not merely ministering *to* the unchurched.

Critical to this was information my wife and I were still digesting from two Australian missiologists (Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch), who we were able to study under for a week in 2003. They had released their first book, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, only five years prior. Frost and Hirsch had come to share with our leadership team what they had learned regarding the social and cultural impact of postmodern thought upon their continent; they spoke prophetically

to something that was beginning in the States, but only subtly and slightly so.¹¹ Yet if we fast forward twelve years, the effects of postmodern thought have since widened the divide between church and culture, exposing and deepening a rift that lay dormant because of the polite cultural Christianity of American religious sentimentality. These were the days when many Americans still believed we were a “Christian nation”.

As we listened to Frost and Hirsch, my wife and I absorbed their teaching because their journey of frustration with the Church was very similar to ours; they longed for a connection with culture and felt a calling to a new place that was difficult to understand. For just as the experience of falling in love explained everything I’d heard and believed about it, so also the teaching of these two men explained much that I had been feeling (about culture, the church and the Kingdom) but could not previously put into words.

These early experiences (of merely intuiting and sensing the radical divide between church and unchurched culture) have now culminated into nearly two decades of study, prayer and passion to reach secularized, disinterested, skeptical and anti-institutional people—lying outside the reach of most Christians—in our own country.¹²

In conclusion, my research surfaced how Patrick experienced something similar to my own life: God weaves the events of our lives (which include the formal education) for a larger plan. Looking back, it is clear how a strong music and arts background (which included a B.A. in music from Hope College in Michigan) gifted me with an inner passion for creativity, beauty and innovation. Soon thereafter the theological education, formation and community while pursuing a Master’s degree (at Trinity School for Ministry) transformed me as a young Christian,

¹¹ Others such as Brian McLaren do not use ‘postmodern’, but prefer ‘post-Colonial’.

¹² The term “secularized” is used here to refer to the process of unchurched persons increasingly separated from the religious and moral roots, from which they were established.

graduating at age 26. Soon thereafter, doctoral-level research on understanding post-modernity and generational theory (at Reformed Theological Seminary), provided a background for work with younger generations who think differently than previous ones about ontology, epistemology and teleology. This educational backdrop led to the pursuit of the Doctor of Ministry at Trinity School for Ministry, and the topic at hand.

Development Of Candidate's Competence

This project and its research has led to the crafting of thoughtful questions, interviews and analysis; it has taught me the value of listening to others. It has been informative concerning the inquiry of questions about leadership, ministry and mission. The conclusions and question that remain will be critical in deriving a practical plan: correcting the mistaken ideas about gospel ministry among the unchurched, partnering with others in their relationships with outsiders, leading by example, teaching important principles that will increase people's missional confidence and effectiveness.

Contribution To Ministry

This project will help colleagues in ministry who feel uneducated, unequipped and inept to lead their people in a way that is socially natural and relevant to the interests and concerns of the unchurched. The research will provide valuable biblical material for preaching and teaching; it will raise valuable positive characteristics, as well as negative concerns and questions; it will convince that innovative practices are necessary to follow in Paul's footsteps: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22).

Defining The ‘Apostolic’ Gift

How The Term “Apostolic”, Will Not Be Used

Before we go any further, it is important to define how the term ‘apostolic’ will *not* be used. First, its use will not attempt to usurp the primacy, or pre-eminence, of our Lord’s twelve Apostles—secured immutably in the biblical witness.¹³ Second, its use will not place any individuals (or their words), on an equal plane of authority with the original twelve; the canon of Scripture is closed, and no words should be added to it, without dire consequences.¹⁴ Third, we will not be using the term to refer to apostolic succession nor will we offer a view on the gifts and their relationship to the offices which deem succession as ineffective or invalid.¹⁵ Fourth, we will not use the term in such a broad sense, that this paper’s focus will be diffused and the specific application of its problem statement, lost.

Two brief examples will serve to highlight the importance of this. In the early days of research I came across more than one figure who were equated with the word ‘apostolic’—one of whom was Irenaeus of Lyons. In Irenaeus’ case, this title existed not only because of his book title (*On Apostolic Preaching*), but his similarity with the twelve Apostles’ as he defended orthodoxy against Gnosticism. However, by broadening the scope of our topic to include such examples as Irenaeus, we would limit the depth of our biblical, theological and historical studies.

Another example of the broad use of ‘apostolic’ includes modern-day “apostles” (as they are called), who demonstrate this gift through supernatural healings, power-encounters and miracles. My point in mentioning such practices is not to call the gifts or individuals into

¹³ Revelation 21:14 states: “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

¹⁴ Revelation 22:19 states: “if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.”

¹⁵ A term for the successive transmission of spiritual authority from the original Apostles, through popes and bishops. This belief is contested by a majority of Protestant groups, but upheld by the Roman Catholic Church.

question; however, the very fact that their focus is not primarily on crossing over social and cultural barriers—but the operation of supernatural charisma—would not fit this paper’s focus. Therefore, we will be using the term in a more limited sense, in order to narrow its scope.

How The Term, “Apostolic”, Will Be Used

First, we are referring to a function of the Church which continues to be important for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. In chapter 2, we will assert that the proper place for this gift is both within and emerging *out of* the local church. In addition to the corporate Church, the term refers to *individuals* who operate with this gift.

Second, the context in which apostolic practices must occur is the world. As “called out ones”, the Church is not to be *of* the world but to live *within* it; the proper residence for apostolic ministry is in the midst of secular plurality:

The Church is itself a plural society. It is a company of those who have been drawn out of every race and caste and class and culture to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the one in whom God himself is present, in whom God has acted uniquely once for all for the salvation of the world, and through whom we are united by the Holy Spirit into one family embracing people of every kind. Every congregation is called to be a sign and foretaste and witness to that plurality in unity.¹⁶

Third, the apostolic functions of churches and individuals have definable *characteristics* (beliefs and practices): they are passionate to *cross over boundaries and divides* that are social, cultural and spiritual; they purposefully build relationships across chasms of indifference, misunderstanding and mistrust; they take the gospel from where it *is*, to where it is *not*, and others from where they *are*, to where they are *not*. Terms that describe such individuals include: “frontier-breaker”, “trans-cultural missionary” and “bridge-builder”.

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 232-233.

“The primary concern of apostles is to help people and communities live out their calling in the church and world. They do this by cultivating a *thriving environment*, calling people to join God in the renewal of all things. They *create a discipleship ethos* in the congregation and *call people to participate in advancing God’s kingdom*. While they can wear any of the equipper’s hats, they seek to build a team of equippers who activate the entire body to fulfill God’s mission in the world through the church.”¹⁷

Contrary to inaccurate portrayals of apostolic individuals as “lone rangers”, Alan Hirsch writes:

“the apostle is the one who is most likely to facilitate the emergence of *communitas*, a particular kind of community that is shaped and formed around a challenge or compelling task.”¹⁸

Fourth, apostolic ministry is not simply about beginning something new but revitalizing the old. It is about reinvigorating individuals, churches, and movements which easily get mired in introversion, administration, and bureaucracy: “Apostolic ministry is not just about founding new churches and movements; it is the renewal of existing organizations, that is, helping the church retain its primal movemental nature and stay vibrant. And so it has ongoing relevance for established churches as well.”¹⁹

Fifth, this paper will argue that there are no scriptural mandates that individuals with apostolic gifts need to be vocational clergy or paid workers with a certain level of formal education or ordination. In the same vein, we will assert there are no limitations to the gifts within the offices themselves: deacons such as Stephen can be apologetically gifted, bishops such as Patrick can be apostolically gifted, and so forth. While making this claim, we want to affirm that there is no conflict between the two aforementioned statements and the traditional ‘pairing’ of functions and offices. The New Testament is replete with Pauline exhortation for

¹⁷ J. R. Woodward and Alan Hirsch, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 114.

¹⁸ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 222.

¹⁹ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 201.

those who hold certain roles and offices to be of a certain character (godly, blameless, temperate, etc.) and to do common tasks with excellence (shepherd, teach, discipline, etc.). There can be in this sense both deviations as well as norms, variables that fall outside of what is common alongside a pattern of historic episcopacy exists to this day.

Sixth, the apostolic gifts in an individual can be seen in both tangible practices (described as behaviors) as well as intangible beliefs and values which undergird these practices. These two characteristics are symbiotic: practices point back to the reality of one's beliefs and values; true beliefs and values naturally lead to practices.²⁰

Finally, whether or not readers are comfortable with the use of "apostolic" in reference to our work today, we can all still choose to set aside the term and learn from the principles and practices laid forth in the pages that follow. If indeed our prayer is to live like Jesus, there are several excellent examples of Christians like Paul and Patrick, and movements both global and local, that show the way. This being said, we now press on to a biblical-theological overview of apostolicity.

²⁰ Symbiotic relationships, for example in biology, involve a radical interdependence-to the extent that if one of the parties dies, the other does as well; this is a fair metaphor for beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER 2—BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: CHARACTERISTICS OF APOSTOLICITY IN THE WORDS AND DEEDS OF ST. PAUL

Having provided an introduction to apostolicity (a working definition as well as nature and scope) we now move to ground its biblical-theological foundation. We will do so in five distinct parts: the Old Testament; the New Testament; Ephesians 4:1-14; Acts 17:16-34; and conclusion.

Part One: Apostolicity In The Old Testament

From the Fall of mankind *through* the establishment of Israel, the Church and *to* the very consummation of time itself, God has always been and will always be, apostolic in nature. As Desmond and Rosner put it, “from the proto-evangelion...to the end of this age, mission is necessitated by humanity’s fall into sin and need for a Saviour and is made possible by the saving initiative of God in Christ.”²¹

By perusing selected passages in the Old Testament and into the New Testament we see a Triune God who is committed to sending and being sent—a God who passionately travels:

The Bible actually begins with the theme of missions in the book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament...thus this theme of a mission to the whole world forms one giant envelope (a figure of speech called an “inclusio”) framing the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.²²

Because it is first and foremost, God’s mission, we would best think not of *our* mission, but rather of cooperating with *God’s* seminal mission: “Mission is not ours; mission is God’s.

Certainly the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get

²¹ T. Desmond Alexander and Brian Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

²² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), xi-xii.

involved in... It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission.”²³ The apostolic character of God was clear before the calling of God’s people and revealed through his people.

God Was Apostolic Prior To The Establishment Of Israel

The first post-fall vignette was when Adam and Eve sinned and hid in the garden; it was then God travelled towards them, calling out for restoration and reconciliation:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid (Gen 3:7-10).

Seated within God’s judgment upon the serpent and the first couple, was a promise of an heir who would triumph where they had failed:

The male child of the women’s “seed” would strike back by crushing the head of the Serpent. This of course would be a lethal blow. It guaranteed that the coming Man of Promise, from the male line of Eve, would once and for all settle the issues that the sin of Adam and Eve had raised. The defeat of the evil one would result in an overwhelming victory in which evil would be vanquished once for all.²⁴

A second instance was in the story of Cain and Abel, the first act of physical treachery within the human race. Even though God had warned Cain before the act of murder, God pursued Cain after the act to confront him and show mercy:

When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your

²³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 62.

²⁴ Kaiser, 3.

presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him (Gen 4:8-15).

A third and final glimpse into God's apostolic pursuit of man—before the calling of Israel—involved God's preservation of humanity through Noah, a merciful intervention amidst the mass depravity of mankind. Here we read the author of Genesis commenting in superlative fashion: "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." (Gen 6:5) In this flood narrative, we see once again the gracious in-break of our Covenant-keeping God who crosses into our time and space to call, provide and sovereignly superintend mankind's salvation through the ark, which rides atop the raging waters of His wrath.

After the flood narrative we see God's mercy in the midst of the Noah's drunken folly:

God gave a special promise to Shem (Gen 9:27) – that He would "dwell in the tents of Shem." This promise to "dwell" was most encouraging for it assured mortals that despite God's transcendence, he would come to planet earth to take up his residence with the line of Shem, the group of people we know as Semites, and live in the midst of them. This word of promise came about as the aftermath of Noah's drunkenness.²⁵

It is through these early Genesis narratives that we see God's resolve to travel—transcending self-existence and self-sufficiency—to extend to humanity the utmost mercy and grace so that we would be saved. Before Israel, there is a clear message of salvation by grace and the revelation of a God Who is indisputably missional.

God Called Israel To Be An Apostolic People

When God called Abram, he was told that all families on the earth would be blessed through him: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great,

²⁵ Kaiser, 5.

and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3).

This was not only a promise of greatness and blessing, but a promise of protection and retribution for Israel’s enemies. Regarding this call, Wright states:

The opening account of creation portrays God working toward a goal, completing it with satisfaction and resting, content with the result. And from the great promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 we know this God to be totally, covenantally and eternally committed to the mission of blessing the nations through the agency of the people of Abraham. In the wake of Genesis 3-11 this is good news indeed for humanity – such that Paul can describe this text as ‘the gospel in advance’ (Gal 3:8).²⁶

This promise to bless all nations would be made four more times in the book of Genesis (18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14) and occur in three specific instances where Jacob blesses Laban (Gen 30:27).

Explicit within this promise of blessing—similar to other promises of provision in the Covenant—was the command for Israel to walk in obedience and bring the knowledge of God to the nations. In fact, God’s choice for Israel was to be a witness to the nations:

All the nations – the whole earth – belongs to YHWH, but he singles out Israel as his special possession (The term ‘treasured possession’ [Hebrew] indicates a king’s personal treasure [cf. 1 Chronicles 29:3], distinguished from his ownership of his whole realm). However, this very singularity of Israel is itself a witness to the nations. In his mighty acts of salvation for his own people God makes himself known to the other nations. God makes himself known as the God of Israel, in the particular identity he has given himself in choosing this one people as his own, but his acts on his people’s behalf make him know at the same time as the one true God of all the earth, whom the nations themselves must also acknowledge.²⁷

The command for Israel to be a blessing to the nations would be stated repeatedly beyond the Genesis narrative in passages such as Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 28:9-10, Joshua 4:23-24 and I Kings 8.

²⁶ Wright, 63.

²⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 36-37.

Yet in the prophets is where we find some of the most implicit teaching—not only through their words but their experiences:

The verities which the prophets uttered and for the sake of which they were called upon to suffer. These relate to the character of God, the moral nature of the universe, especially in the incidence of nemesis or judgment, and the redemptive value of suffering unjustly borne. The life of these prophets, in turn, testifies to a faith and presents a witness which, in theological terms, specifically prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.²⁸

One of the most elaborate apostolic examples is in the book of Jonah, on that is dedicated to communicating God's heart for all people—even those who are the farthest away geographically and morally. Commenting on Jonah's role, Kaiser writes:

But mark it well: to send a messenger to a city so well known in its day, with resources that few if any rivaled, was to grab the attention of others besides those to whom the prophet was sent...It would be a public example for all the surrounding nations. Few would have ever thought that a city and nation so self-sufficient would ever be capable of being stirred to repentance and reformation. But if this one nation should by any chance respond to the call for repentance, despite the unlikelihood of success, surely that would come as an open rebuke to Israel, who had such superior advantages in the gospel, as well as to the other nations that were just as vulnerable to similar declarations of impending judgment.²⁹

Jonah's contribution is intended to reflect more than the substance of his verbal proclamation, but a parallel between the Prophet and the nation of Israel:

The book concerns *God's* "missionary" overture to Nineveh and the need for Israel to imitate the divine mission in its own life. Jonah/Israel is still "necessary" as a messenger, however, for some reason that is assumed rather than explained. Apparently only through the agency of Israel can the Ninevites hear God's message.⁶⁶ In this way, the book of Jonah can be very much about evangelism, so long as evangelism is understood more broadly. Evangelism in this broader sense is actually the *imitation of God*, an activity that entails a whole range of practices, habits, dispositions, activities, and choices. From this perspective, evangelism cannot be reduced to the character of Jonah's verbal proclamation. Evangelism must instead be *expanded* to include a thicker set of practices.³⁰

²⁸ Robert Dobbie, "The biblical foundation of the mission of the church: the Old Testament", *International Review Of Mission* 63, no. 1 (spring 1962): 201.

²⁹ Kaiser, 71.

³⁰ Stephen B. Chapman and Lacey Warner, "Jonah and the imitation of God: rethinking evangelism and the Old Testament", *Journal Of Theological Interpretation* (2002): 59.

God's positioning of Israel was not merely with words, but events like the Exodus: "For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Exod 9:16) In fact, one of the purposes for the annual remembrance of the Exodus (as with the other annual festivals) was to be an ongoing witness to the gentiles. It is not surprising therefore, that we find many gentiles leaving Egypt with the people of Israel.³¹

Another powerful example of a Divine act being for the purpose of global witness, was the establishment of the temple itself, as seen in Solomon's prayer:

As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name -- for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm -- when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name (1 Kgs 8:41-43).

Perusing the Old Testament in this light, other events can be seen as "mandatory missions", such as the diasporas (Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Neronian) and the involuntary sending of God's people to live amidst pagan cultures (Ruth, Esther, Joseph, Daniel and so forth); all means through which the gospel was spread, leading into the New Testament. It is quite profound that God paradoxically accomplishes a tremendous amount of apostolic activity through events that involve also attempted genocide, divine discipline (scattering) and persecution. It does not appear that the Gospel is hindered by these events, but actually released *through* them. Thus, no longer would the covenant faith be constrained to Israel's theocratic national identity, but emancipated through what appeared on the surface as epic disasters for His people.

³¹ Note for example the "mixed multitude" of Exodus 12:28 as well as laws for "strangers" who celebrate the Passover with Jews (Exod 12:48-49).

As we conclude this overview of apostolicity in the Old Testament we must be careful not to limit the scope of salvation. The spread of the gospel from the Exodus onwards was not merely verbal, but holistic; a redemption that was not merely “spiritual”, but integrated:

In the exodus God responded to all the dimensions of Israel’s need. God’s momentous act of redemption did not merely rescue Israel from political, economic and social oppression and leave them to their own devices to worship whom they pleased. Nor did god merely offer them spiritual comfort of hope for some brighter future in a home beyond the sky while leaving their historical condition unchanged. No, the exodus effected real change in the people’s real historical situation and at the same time called them into a real new relationship with the living God. This was God’s total response to Israel’s total need.³²

The holistic nature of salvation is clear when looking at the very tactile and temporal integration of converts into every part of Jewish life (law, education, daily and weekly rhythms, yearly feast, diet, etc.). However, salvation becomes obscure in the period of Greco-Roman dualism (body versus spirit), which began to change the idea of belief from altering one’s way of living to mental assent; in the Greek mind one could believe something to be true yet there may be no visible transformation. This grew increasingly common in the early years of the church to the point that within first-generation Christianity, Paul combatted Gnosticism and antinomianism as non-integrated forms of Christian spirituality. The need for a “holistic exodus” existed then, and is drastically needed today as well.

Tennent comments on this dilemma in a different but helpful way: “Missions summons people not merely to “make a decision” to follow Christ but also to enter the community of the faithful, the church, and to live out the realities of the future in the present before the eyes of the world in real space-time history.”³³ We now move to see the New Testament’s reflection of God’s apostolic heart.

³² Wright, 271.

³³ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 692.

Part Two: Apostolicity In The New Testament

The New Testament is robust with apostolic engagement that began in the former covenant and continues through the new; Jesus' disciples understood they were not beginning a missionary venture, but taking over an old one:

The apostolic interpretation of the ancient promises proclaimed that their fulfilment was in Jesus Christ and his church. The OT images of seed and blessing were foundational to the way the early church understood Jesus and his mission of salvation for the nations. Since the Davidic promise concerned primarily the individual 'seed', the relationship of Christ to the patriarch David was more important in the Gospels and Acts than the epistles. The apostle Paul's concern was the identity of the church as Abraham's many 'nations' and 'descendants'.³⁴

The Trinity As Apostolic

One striking difference between these two covenants is the revelation of God as Trinity—the unveiling of the Son and Spirit of God as apostolic members of the Godhead. The calling of the Apostles (and the calling to apostolic activity beyond their time) did not originate in Jesus' disciples, but within the very nature of the Trinity. This sending work of the Father (as well as the obedience of the Son and the Spirit to be sent) is the precedent for the Church's call today: “God the Father is the Sender and, therefore, the ultimate source of all missionary sending ... from the perspective of the triune God, Jesus is the one who himself was sent into the world by the Father. It is only as a “sent one” that Jesus is granted the authority to send.”³⁵

In the Gospels we see God as Father, sending His Son. This emerges so beautifully in the Gospel of John (where after an enigmatic introduction of the *λόγος*), where he unwraps the mysterious identity as the Son of God, sent from God: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from

³⁴ Alexander, 895.

³⁵ Tennant, 76.

the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).³⁶ John clarifies later that this was a sending: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).

Other Gospel writers speak about the relationship between Father and Son in this way: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18). Therefore it could be said that the first act of the New Testament was an apostolic God, sending His Son to be born as one of us, God With Us:

History is the stage for the unfolding of the *missio Dei*. Nowhere is this revealed more profoundly than the Incarnation. In the presence of Jesus of Nazareth we find the final, definitive evidence that the Trinity is not merely some interiorized, abstract speculation about a remote being but the very means through which God himself intersects with human history to accomplish His redemptive plan.³⁷

The second act could be said to be the obedience *of* the Son to be *sent*, an apostolic commission for His disciples and the world: “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me” (John 17:25). As confirmation that his “sent-ness” was not to be stationary, inert or static, Jesus resisted his disciples’ attempts to establish ministry in one locale; when invited to remain for longer than desired, Jesus responded: “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43). In fact, if Jesus’ ministry had a headquarters (so to speak), it would have been less clear that He was on a mission that required apostolic movement to engaged new towns and unknown people. He would later describe his situation metaphorically: “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matt 8:20). Lesslie Newbigin observes that: “the mission of Jesus was not only to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but

³⁶ All Greek terms have been copied from e-Sword

³⁷ Tennent, 82.

also to embody the presence of the Kingdom of God in his own person.”³⁸ Jesus was constantly “re-sent” so that we could capture God’s inconsumable heart for the world and thus keep the Gospel light on its feet and always on the move (Ephesians 6). Jesus crossed barriers of all kinds—including geographic, social, economic, class, race and gender—providing an example for how we should conduct mission:

The parallel between God sending Jesus and Jesus sending his disciples describes both the method and the content of mission. The church’s mission, then, encompasses everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do. It does not include everything the church does or everything God does in the world. Therefore, to say the church *is* mission is an overstatement. Nevertheless, to ignore or compromise the commission to go into all the world as Jesus’ representatives shows a defective life. A church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.³⁹

The third Divine act that was begun in the Old Testament, developed within the Gospels and explained in greater detail throughout the Epistles, was the sending of the Holy Spirit. Though there are some churches and leaders who tend to emphasize one member of the Trinity as superior (or inferior) than another, the Scriptures present all as working together in concert, in order to accomplish the salvific work of God:

Salvation is part of the economy, first of all, of the Trinity. The plan of salvation reflects the purpose of the will of God the Father, who has sent the Son to carry it out (Eph 1:3–10). The divine righteousness has appeared in history, both in the mission of the Son, who accomplishes salvation, and in the mission of the Spirit, who applies salvation by relating believers to Christ (John 14–16). Salvation is thus a result of the concerted action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

Though the Spirit never speaks on His own, there is much said on His behalf: “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (John

³⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 40.

³⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 435

⁴⁰ Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney and Daniel Reid, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 754.

3:34). Upon Jesus' departure, the disciples are promised that "when the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father--the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father--he will testify about me" (John 15:26). The Church's task was not to attain more *of* the Spirit but obey the leadership of the Spirit as those whom have already received the Heavenly Gift. Moreover, as the Spirit dwells with followers of Christ in their complexity, mystery and suffering, they in turn dwell with others:

Mission in relation to a single, acting subject requires only a flattened discernment too easily co-opted by the instrumental logic of strategic action. A theology of participation, however, delivers the church from viewing its engagement with the world only in instrumental or strategic terms. In a postcolonial world, congregations in mission cannot simply proclaim *to* the world what they have received. Instead, they engage in mission, expecting to find the gospel of a Triune God in suffering participation *with* the world.⁴¹

It is essential to recognize that the omnipresent Spirit of God who hovered over the waters at creation—is not limited to temporal (or geographical) constraints. The Spirit works in the people of God but also in culture: "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak" (Ezek 34:11,16). Adam Dodds summarizes this point beautifully:

The global nature of the Spirit's mission is to be contrasted with the geographical limitation of the church's mission, which is not a fault but simply an aspect of its creaturely finitude. This ecclesial limitation has been exploited by some scholars in order to drive a wedge between pneumatology and ecclesiology and suggest that the Spirit can reach people without the church engaging in mission.⁴²

The Apostolic Mandate Of The New Testament Church

⁴¹ Swart, Johannes Gerhardus Jacobus, et al. "Toward a missional theology of participation: ecumenical reflections on contributions to Trinity, mission, and church", *Missiology* 37, no. 1 (January 2009): 86.

⁴² Adam Dodds, "The Mission of the Spirit and the Mission of the Church: Towards a Trinitarian Missiology", *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 35, no. 3 (July 2011): 223.

It was the willingness of the Father to send his Son and the submissive obedience of the Son and Spirit wherein lies the example and *authority* for the Church's apostolic calling. Jesus correlates his calling with ours when he states: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

This call is based on a commissioning by Christ to all of us, upon whom he has placed his authority—a commission that begins with Christ and ends with his return: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20). Wood and Marshall capture this well:

Because their authority depended on Christ's direct personal commission, they had, properly speaking, no successors; but each generation of Christians must show its continuity with the first generation, and its allegiance to Christ, by subjecting its own faith and life to the norm of teaching which Christ's appointed delegates provided and put on record for all time in the documents of the NT. Through the NT, apostolic *exousia* over the church has been made a permanent reality.⁴³

This apostolic commissioning occurs in often-quoted passages such as Matthew 28:19 where the Greek imperative is used: we must "go!" (*πορεύομαι* means to traverse, travel or depart). In a similar way, Luke tells us: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" (10:2-3). The word used for "send" (*ἐκβάλλω*) means to throw, thrust out, eject or drive out, carrying a sense of positive violence whereby the Lord of the harvest were expelling workers into the field; if the prolific growth were not gathered in time, it would be spoiled.

⁴³ D.R. Wood and Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 106.

Jesus makes it clear that this apostolic calling is not to take them out of the world: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18).

The fact that the call of the church is to continue this apostolic activity well beyond the period of the apostles is clear in Paul’s logical dialectic that belief cannot occur without it: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14-15). Within this syllogism lies an argument: if people remain who have not heard, then there remains a need for people to be sent. It is with this Biblical-theological overview that we now turn to two passages in the New Testament that provide essential attributes of apostolic ministry for the Church and world.

Part Three: Apostolicity In Ephesians 4:1-16

In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul conveys the importance of apostolicity that is uniformly connected within, and operationally effective for, the local church. In Acts chapter 17, Luke focuses on Paul’s words and actions among the pagan thinkers of the Areopagus. Both texts are indispensable for a proper knowledge and praxis that is grounded in the local church and effective for a wide range of people in every generation.

Chapter Four In Context

Before launching into an exegesis of Ephesians chapter 4, a brief note about its context within the Epistle. Most commentators agree that chapter 4 marks a distinct turn in Paul’s focus

from theology and doctrine to practice and behavior. Interestingly, Paul begins this transition from theology to practice with the topic of spiritual gifts. Is it plausible that by inserting these verses midway through the epistle, Paul was inferring the gifts are necessary to apply the truths of the first three chapters? If this is so, Paul was communicating that the gifts are critical for the unity of the church (the verses preceding 4:11) as well as the equipping, releasing and building up of the church (the verses following 4:11):

One might also say that the writer moves from the immanent trinity to the economic trinity, from God as worshipped to God as working, from the question of what God means to us to the question of what we mean to God, from believing in the Trinity to participating in the Trinity, from the fullness of God to being filled with the fullness of God (3:19), from the mission of God to the mission of the church. Of course, the movement between these thoughts must not be held rigidly, for they are closely interrelated.⁴⁴

Though my exegesis will focus on verses 11-16, what comes prior to verse 11 is important to our understanding of the five-fold gifts (and will therefore also apply to apostleship as one of the gifts presented in 4:11). In terms of flow, the chapter content is cohesive from beginning to end with conjunctions that transition from one thought to another (words such as “but” (4:7) and “so” (4:11)), tying the logic of the chapter together into one cohesive pericope. For this reason, I will briefly mention what is present in these preceding verses (many of these topics will be revisited in 4:11-16) as they will relate to the content of Acts 17 and later chapters of this thesis.

The importance Of Character

In Ephesians 4:1-2 we read: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” All the gifts are to mirror the character of “a life worthy”, yet who embodies such a life?

⁴⁴ Isam E. Ballenger, "Ephesians 4:1-16", *Interpretation* 51, no. 3 (July 1, 1997): 292.

First, Paul makes the unmistakable connection between he and the Lord by describing himself as “a prisoner of the Lord”. Pursuing the metaphor, as captive to the Lord he is at the Lord’s bidding; the Lord and His will is his “master”. The particle οὐν connects Paul’s servitude to Christ with his admonishment to live a life worthy of the calling—enslaved to the Lord.

Within this idea of captivity and enslavement, we can infer the idea of suffering:

Since the apostles (except in the sense of delegates of the churches) were witnesses of the resurrection and formed the foundation of the church, it follows that their office was a first-generation phenomenon and incapable of repetition; they had no successors, and in principle there cannot be any. Yet the church can and must still be apostolic in the sense that it must live by their teaching, enshrined in the NT Scriptures, and must follow their example of suffering with their Lord.⁴⁵

In describing “a life worthy”, Paul provides a list of adjectives that are now to mark the lifestyles of the Ephesians. By doing so, Paul answers the question, “what does five-fold ministry look like today?” in two parts. First, five-fold ministry must look like Jesus, and like Paul; the character must mimic the life that these two have laid out. Second, five-fold ministry is marked by the adjectives presented in 4:2-3: humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love.

These attributes, especially that of humility, would have been in conflict with the general culture of the day (political, military, education, religion, etc.); especially the aristocrats—who were by reputation, ambitious, harsh, intemperate and impatient. In his commentary on Ephesians, Andrew T. Lincoln comments, “ταπεινοφροσύνη, “humility”, is literally “lowliness of mind” and to be contrasted therefore with being high-minded or haughty...as is frequently observed, humility was an attitude that was regarded primarily negatively in the Greco-Roman

⁴⁵ Ferguson, 40.

world and associated with contemptible servitude.”⁴⁶ For the Ephesians to demonstrate such counter-cultural attributes, they would need the five-fold gifts in order to be taught, encouraged and at times, confronted. As a result of such character, the Ephesians would not strive to rise to the top, but would rather “make every effort” to preserve unity in the Holy Spirit through peace. Conversely, if the gifts were not operated in the character of Jesus, if every effort was not made towards unity, the consequences would be the opposite of what we see in verses 1-16: disunity, chaos, unrest, disarmament and destruction.

An Emphasis On Unity

Paul restates the importance of unity again in 4:4-6 (as well as 4:12 and 4:16) with a more lengthy rationale. Since there is one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith and baptism, the Ephesians (and by association the use of the gifts) are to be always uniformly submitted to God. Essential for this to occur is the gifts all working together.

Biblically and historically, this relational unity within the five-fold gifts is easier to see between pastoring and teaching than the others; these two gifts have their primary field of operation within the faith community, and for that community. There is rarely any question about the veracity or necessity of pastoring and teaching, and prophecy in Paul’s day appeared widely accepted as necessary and normative, though it is obviously highly contested today.⁴⁷

However, the first two gifts of apostleship and evangelism often find themselves operation outside of the local church. As a result, there is often a greater potential for miscommunication, insurrection and abuse. To correct this problem, Paul stresses the need for character of first importance both before, as well as after, the gifts themselves.

⁴⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 42, Ephesians* (Waco, TX: Nelson, 1990), 362.

⁴⁷ See also 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 4:14.

Paul did not simply exhort the Ephesians to live this way, he practiced it himself. After Paul's conversion he went to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem in order to submit his apostolic ministry, realizing the importance of the relationship between apostolic ministry and the church leadership: "Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain" (Gal 2:1-2). The result was that "James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along" (Gal 2:1-10).

At risk was an unhealthy precedent for the church, from its infancy, to have apostolic personalities operating without the blessing of those who were entrusted to its care—creating strife and disunity. However, as a result of Paul's demonstration of Christ-like humility, wisdom and trust in God's providence—submission was honored, unity was preserved and the gospel moved forward. On this passage, Stott comments: "Where these are absent no external structure of unity can stand. But when this strong base has been laid, then there is good hope that a visible unity can be built. We may be quite sure that no unity is pleasing to God which is not the child of charity."⁴⁸

The Source And Distribution Of Gifts

⁴⁸ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984), 150.

As a final prologue to verse 11, Paul states in verse 7: “to each one of us grace has been given.”⁴⁹ Not everyone has the same portion: some have many and some have few; some have more of a specific gift than another. Yet the Ephesians are to remember that Christ is the source of the gifts themselves and their allotment; the gifts are to be received with gratitude and not to be coveted because they are given “to each one”—no one is left wanting. Arnold elaborates:

Paul indicates that Christ is the one who actually gives the gift...Christ does not apportion gifts in a random way, but according to his plan. He is the one who determines the amount of the gift that each person will receive. This is the most natural explanation of “according to the measure” (κατὰ τὸ μέτρον). The emphasis here is on Christ’s sovereign distribution and apportionment. There is no room left for good works and merit to earn a better gift or a greater portion of the gift.⁵⁰

Paul connects verse 7 to verse 8 with a modifier, “this is why”. In doing so, he ties Christ’s gift-giving with an allusion to Psalm 68:18 which states: “When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious-- that you, LORD God, might dwell there.” He then connects verses 8-10 with verse 11, using the conjunction “so”. Before completing this introduction, it is important to explain the metaphor, Paul’s three-fold syllogism and its relevance to the five-fold gifts.

In Psalm 68:18, God is pictured as a warrior ascending the holy mountain after defeating his enemies. Paul implies by association that this Old Testament typology is fulfilled in Christ, who (after the cross and resurrection), ascended into heaven—like a King marches into his city and sits on his rightful throne. Furthermore, because Christ was victorious on the cross, he “took many captives” (4:8).

The question remains, “who are these captives?” Arnold answers:

The best explanation for the identity of these hostile warriors that Christ has defeated is the principalities, powers and authorities. They hold a prominent place in Ephesians as

⁴⁹ The word grace (χάρις) is a common pseudonym for “spiritual gifts” used in other Pauline gifts passages.

⁵⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 234.

the enemies of Christ and the people of God. They are the foes that Paul names as defeated and put into subjection by his resurrection in 1:20-22. In Col. 2:15 Paul specifically says that by the cross and resurrection, Christ stripped them of their power and authority, publicly exposed them and led them in a triumphal procession.⁵¹

In light of Paul's admonition later in Ephesians 6:12 ("For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"), this appears correct.

Continuing, we're told that after defeating his foes, he "gave gifts to his people."

(Ephesians 4:8) The sense here is that as a King would plunder his enemies and receive rewards for his victory, so Christ plundered satan (the "strong man" in Mark 3:27), however rather than horde the spoils as many kings were known to do, Christ gave the recompense away! What a powerful image of Christ's victory march into heaven, Satan's defeat and the generous distribution of precious wealth—not a bounty of lands or monies but gifts from the Spirit for the church and world!

This translation quite adequately fits biblical typology whereby its fulfillment actually goes far beyond the author's original imaginative scope. Lunde and Dunne comment:

As Yahweh ascended to his temple on Zion, so also does Jesus ascend to the highest place—even to the right hand of God (cf. Eph 1:20; 2:6). As Yahweh supplied strength and power to his people as a result of his enthronement in the temple, so also does Jesus provide his people with enabling gifts as a consequence of his ascension to the highest place. The Christological implications of this paralleling between Yahweh and Christ are quite profound, especially since Jesus' ascent brings Yahweh's actions in the psalm to their cosmic *lelos* and accomplishes a dominion that outstrips even the psalmist's eschatological vision.⁵²

In verses 8-9, Paul continues with what appears as an aside: "This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." What does "he

⁵¹ Arnold, 251.

⁵² Jonathan Lunde and John Anthony Dunne. "Paul's creative and contextual use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8", *Westminster Theological Journal* 74, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 108.

ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?" Though many scholars provide dense theological discussion about the possibility of Christ's descent into hell, Kent Hughes interprets this as not a literal descent, but a symbol of Christ's voluntary humility: "Paul is simply borrowing the imagery of Psalm 68 and applying it to Christ's incarnation and ascension...another way of indicating the humiliation of coming to earth (cf. John 3:13)...but then he burst up in exaltation – so that now he fills the whole universe as a conquering King and joyously lavishes gifts upon his children."⁵³ This ties with a theme with which Paul began the chapter: Humility begins with the character of Christ.

It is with this realization of the precious price that was paid, the invaluable worth of the Giver, and the gifts he has given, that we look at characteristics of the gifts themselves.

The Characteristics Of The Gifts

Whereas the first section of chapter 4 had as a central theme the unity of the gifts, we now see their salient characteristics. What we discover in this process is that unity must not be confused with uniformity; true unity celebrates the cooperation of disparate parts. In fact, their diversity is what makes their gracious cooperation a supernatural witness to the Church and world that they are not man-made—but given by God.

As we enter into the corpus of Ephesians 4, there emerges three very important characteristics of the gifts in this list: distinctiveness, interdependence and purpose.

Their Distinctiveness

⁵³ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 132.

It is essential we explore what Paul intended by including ἀπόστολος as a distinctive gift within the five-fold list. Some commentators merely avoid the hermeneutical dilemma in breaking asunder what is a fixed (and bounded) set of five consecutive nouns. It is my assertion that, having included ‘apostles’ as one of the five gifts in this list, Paul sought to communicate the timeless importance of apostolic activity for both the reader in the present and the Church of the future. Furthermore, by reading Paul’s usage of ἀπόστολος—not as looking back at Christ’s establishment of the twelve Apostles but looking forward—he communicated that apostolicity would always be necessary if there were people to be reached. Thus, rather than break up the set which appears hermeneutically inconsistent (by dismissing some of the gifts as irrelevant for the future and some not) it strengthens the list by expressing their distinctness, diversity, interdependence and unity.

The exegetical problem arises because many biblical authors, including Paul, use the same word in different ways—for example in Ephesians 2:19-20. In this passage Paul states: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” To some, Paul would not utilize the same word in Ephesians in different places, with divergent references (utilizing ἀπόστολος to refer to the twelve Apostles as well as the timeless apostolicity of the church). However, to others this is not a problem at all.

We see this same flexibility in Paul’s use of the Old Testament. Could Paul not utilize a word to look back at the original twelve, and also use that same word to refer to the gift for future generations? Of course. In fact, one could say that this type of usage actually solidifies a connection between the Apostles on whom the church was founded, and the apostolically gifted

ones who carry the church forward. It could actually be that Ephesians 4:11 was an elaboration of what Paul began in 2:20 (adding evangelists, pastors and teachers to the list of gifts needed for the local church). If this is correct, one could see a development in Paul's thinking: what was needed for him, other apostolic individuals and the Church of the future, is a more comprehensive five-fold team who would fit together as perfectly as the parts of a house, or the members of a body.

On the use of 'apostle' in Ephesians 4:11, Arnold writes:

This passage is different than 2:20, however, in that Paul is not reflecting back on the beginnings of the church but is speaking about its present and ongoing structure. Christ is continuing to give these leaders to the church for the equipping of the individual members and facilitating their growth to maturity...Markus Barth rightly notes, "Ephesians distinctly presupposes that living apostles and prophets are essential to the church's life."⁵⁴

In the writings of Paul, and others in the New Testament, we see this same forward-looking use of ἀποστέλλω: In Luke's inclusion of Barnabas as an apostle (Acts 14:4,14); in Paul's reference to what many scholars conclude was the husband-and-wife apostolic team of Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7); in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians (2:7), where Timothy and Silvanus were included as apostles of Christ (who could have, but did not assert their rightful authority alongside Paul); finally, in Apollos' ministry who was always travelling and operating apostolically: "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah" (Acts 18:26-28). Commenting on Apollos, Marshall and Wood write, "It is significant that the eloquent travelling

⁵⁴ Arnold, 256.

preacher, Apollos, who became an important figure in the apostolic church, was an Alexandrian Jew, and ‘well versed in the Scriptures’” (Acts 18:24).⁵⁵

In terms of behaviors, the apostolic function evidences itself through behaviors such as intuiting, discerning, relating, networking, rapport-building, initiating and creating. We will see these functions with more clarity in Paul’s operation in Athens, as we seem them repeatedly in Jesus ministry (for example with the Samaritan woman in John 4).

In addition, apostolic individuals tend to: show initiative as they build relationships with others outside of their primary social group; use intuition to know what to say and not to say as they keenly investigate and research cultural groups; are creative rapport-builders who take risks in reaching others outside their tribe; are consummate networkers as they connect new friends with other believers; have a heart to connect the individual reached with the community; and desire to track the spiritual development of the individual or group through stages of spiritual maturity. We see many if not all of these characteristics in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, and though these do not describe every apostolic person, they describe many.

Their Interdependence

A second characteristic of the gifts in the New Testament is the interdependence and mutual exchange the gifts have with one another. This exists both in function as well as in the personalities who wield them. For the five-fold gifts to fulfill their purpose in verses 12-16 their functions and related personalities must cooperate in order to protect inherent weaknesses and leverage strengths. Paul appears to allude to this complementary relationship, utilizing the human body as a metaphor for the way the aforementioned gifts work together: “From him the whole

⁵⁵Wood, 24.

body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (4:16).

The terms that Paul uses to describe this interdependence is that they are “joined” (συναρμολογέω) and “held together” (συμβιβάζω). The former is a term meaning to fit or frame together, used in Ephesians 2:21—related to the construction of a building. The latter is a word related to the foot (or act of walking). When the Ephesians each do their part to “work” (ἐνέργεια), and do so inseparably as ligament to bone, the body grows and strengthens in maturity.

Their Purpose

We turn now to the last of the three gift characteristics: their purpose. There is much lively debate on how the five verses from 4:12-16, relate to one another. For the sake of brevity, verses 12-13 give an overview of their purpose; then—as is common for New Testament didactic literature (including that of Ephesians)—successive verses 14-16 elaborate with direct application where the Ephesians need such explanation.

Verse 12 mentions three primary purposes: equipping, releasing and building. Though there is also debate among scholars if there are two or three distinct phrases in this verse, I have chosen the latter. The term “equipping” (καταρτισμός), used only one time here in the New Testament as a noun, is used here in verb form to bring something to a condition of fitness and perfection, to fit, strengthen and to complete (as in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:19). In his article, T. David Gordon offers the following summary of the term:

What Calvin, Owen and Hodge all seem to promote is an understanding that is quite consistent with the context.⁷ Contextually there is the great Pauline picture of a body consisting of many parts with Christ as the (organizing and governing) Head. Somehow he manages to "join" and "knit together" the "whole body" in such a way that "each part

is working properly" (4:16). In the only two other places in the NT where the term is used with application to the corporate Church it has this meaning (cf. 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11).⁵⁶

The individuals who are being equipped are “saints” (ἅγιος), a term that is widely used in the New Testament for the laity of the local church. By adding this direct object, a strata is introduced and Paul conveys that all of these gifts (including that of apostleship) are offered for the laity of the local church by recognized leaders who are preparing them for service.

Some commentators assume that these leaders must be clergy, an eisegetical error that superimposes upon the text an institutional model that did not exist at the time. John Stott concurs by stating, “There is no mention of presbyter-bishops or deacons...still less of ‘bishops, presbyters and deacons’ which came to be developed in the second century...To separate the ‘institutional’ from the ‘charismatic’, or ministerial ‘order’ from ministerial ‘gifts’, is a false distinction and a disastrous one”⁵⁷. The classic work, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, adds further clarification:

The burning question in this list is whether these people are to be thought of in terms of their function or as holders of an office (*see Churches, Pauline*). In keeping with the prior lists, when ministries of these kinds are mentioned, the emphasis still seems to be on function. In any case, with this list one moves somewhat beyond Paul’s own understanding of *charismata*, either as “Spirit manifestations” or as “forms of service.” It is doubtful whether Paul ever considered an “office” in the church as a “spiritual gift,” either in terms of a *charisma* or as a special endowment of the Spirit. That seems to be the reading of these texts from a later time.⁵⁸

Though it isn’t likely these positions were permanent offices within the church, verse 12 implies a separation between those who wield these gifts in a leadership capacity and those who are

⁵⁶ David T. Gordon, "Equipping" Ministry in Ephesians 4", *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 74.

⁵⁷ Stott, 164-165.

⁵⁸ Gerald F.Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 345.

equipped, released and built up by the gifts; as such, these are positions recognized in the local church as having influence and authority to accomplish these purposes but not more.

In addition to equipping the saints, the second purpose we see for the five-fold gifts is that of releasing: Laity are trusted by their leaders for works of service (ἔργον διακονία), which are often translated as “deeds of ministry” or “acts of relief”; a distinction is made between those who are being released into diaconal service, and those who are overseeing. If those who were leading in areas of giftedness were also doing all of the works of service, they would no longer be able to oversee and lead. Page’s article is a good summary of the three phrases and the meanings of the Greek words: “In any case, it is unlikely that the term diakonae designates ministry that every believer could perform, since the context emphasizes that believers have been given different gifts and implies that there is no one gift that all believers possess.”⁵⁹

The third purpose is “building” (οἰκοδομή), as 4:11 states, “so that the body of Christ may be built up”; οἰκοδομή is used 18 times in the New Testament, almost entirely meaning to “edify” or “build up”—a word Paul has used previously both for the building of a physical body and a house; the five-fold gifts add strength, integrity, solidity and security as “in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21).

Paul continues with a reminder of the goal: “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Before any more explanation of the purpose of the gifts, “the ministers are to carry out their task both until the whole Church reaches this goal and in order that it might reach this goal.”⁶⁰ Because Paul knows mankind’s proclivity to miss the ends and thus the means, he

⁵⁹ S. H. T. Page, “Whose Ministry? A Re-appraisal of Ephesians 4:12”, *Novum Testamentum* 47, no. 1 (2005): 26-46.

⁶⁰ Lincoln, 255.

reminds the Ephesians of a goal that surpasses the community's existence: the unification of a global faith, the knowledge of the Son of God and a maturity which is marked by likeness to the stature of Christ.

The goal of the gifts is also for the maturing (τέλειος), perfecting and completing to the stature of Christ, growing up (as a physical body matures) so they are filled to the full with Christ himself. Building upon what he said earlier, it is the fullness (πλήρωμα) of Christ that "fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:23) and has a "love that surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19). The following summary, provided by members of the Iliff school of theology, expresses the implicit complexities of Paul's metaphors:

The complexity of the Greek at this point probably reflects the groping of the author for language to express the intricacies of the growth process. At least three central components of the symbol work together to effect its evocative and invitational power: 1. Christ as "the head" connects and links together the bodily parts by measuring out (cf .4:7, 13) energy for each part and their points of contact; 2. the body is a complex of parts "connected and linked together" into a "whole"; 3. energized by Christ its head, "the whole body creates the body's growth in order to structure itself in love."⁶¹

Paul's explanation continues by including the critical role of protecting in verse 14. When the gifts are employed, the body is brought from being an "infant" (14) to "mature" (15) in Christ; members of the body will be strong, wise and secure in their faith as adults rather than weak, naïve and susceptible to be tossed as boats in a storm. As such, they will be able to stand against false teachings and their deceitful teachers:

infants are defenseless, unable to protect themselves; in the spiritual life they are an easy prey for false teachers and others who would like to lead them astray from the true path. Like ships at sea without adequate means of steering, they are tossed about by the waves and carried this way and that according to the prevailing wind. Maturity brings with it the capacity to evaluate various forms of teaching, to accept what is true and reject what is false."⁶²

⁶¹ H. Edward Everding, Clarence H Snelling, and Mary M. Wilcox, "A shaping vision of community for teaching in an individualistic world : Ephesians 4:1-16 and developmental interpretation", *Religious Education* 83, no. 3 (1988): 430.

In order to protect the church, and as a sign of their maturation into adulthood, there would need to be the “speaking of truth in love”. A worthwhile hypothesis is that there was a timidity (an unhealthy genteelness) within the Ephesian community that actually worked against maturity, as when a parent spares the rod (Prov 13:24). This boldness—to exhort and even confront those who were walking away from the faith—was frequent in Paul’s ministry; genuine, honest speech does not stand opposed to what Paul proposed at the beginning of this chapter (e.g. humility); rather it stands paradoxically alongside it. Paul’s section on gifts ends with the following four purposes, as if to summarize major motifs which were already discussed: growing (15-16), fitting (16), loving (16) and working (16).

Part Four: Apostolic Ministry In Acts 17:16-34

As we approach Acts 17:16-34, an important question for us to ask is, “why did Luke include this material?” One possible answer is that Luke desired to communicate replicable patterns of apostolic behavior—a template for future endeavors. As F.F. Bruce states: “The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans.”⁶³ Luke’s purpose was not to showboat Paul’s rhetorical genius or highlight Athenian idiocy, but provide a prototype to communicate essential characteristics and apostolic orthopraxis then, and now.

Before simply diving into the text, it will be helpful to provide some historical and cultural background. This will not only enlighten us as to why Paul communicated in the way he did, but why he chose to be silent on matters some attest he mistakenly (or sinfully) omitted.

⁶² Bruce, 351.

⁶³ Ibid., 341.

This background to the context of Athens and Paul's audience will provide valuable insights how to speak and move within post-Christendom today.

The Context Of Acts 17:16-34

The splendor of Athens had faded by the New Testament period; since the days of Pericles (461-429 B.C.), her glory was not what it was. The Romans had conquered it in 146 B.C. and yet because of its prestige, Athens was allowed to retain its own local government—providing a sense of autonomy unique to conquered cities. Thus, even in Paul's day it remained an important center of art, literature, philosophy and oratory:

The sculpture, literature and oratory of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. have, indeed, never been surpassed. In philosophy, too, she occupied the leading place, being the native city of Socrates and Plato, and the adopted home of Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno ...her political glory as the cradle of democracy was not completely dimmed.”⁶⁴

As in other cities, Paul began in Athens by reasoning in the synagogue with the Jewish and gentile worshipers, eventually transitioning to the marketplace where he preached to all who would listen; this was the point of contact with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

The Epicureans were followers Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who taught that the chief end of man was pleasure and happiness that was attained by avoiding excesses, seeking peace, freedom from pain and loving others. They believed that the gods are not involved in earthly affairs, if they exist at all. The Stoics were pantheistic followers of Zeno (ca. 320-250 B.C.), believing that a great Divinity was directing history. As such, man's responsibility was to align himself with this Divinity and attain their highest goal by subjecting themselves to the Divine's providential destiny.

⁶⁴ Bruce, 329.

We're told that the group of questioning philosophers took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus—the “Hill of Ares” (a.k.a. “Mars Hill”), under the *Stoas*.⁶⁵ This was the meeting place for the Athenian council who even in Paul's day: “had great power, trying crimes and regulating, for example, city life, education, philosophical lectures, public morality, and foreign cults.”⁶⁶

Paul may have been brought to the Areopagus because of their spiritual curiosity as well as their desire to maintain the city's moral and educational stability. As Luke reports, the Athenians and foreign residents loved to debate the latest ideas, so it appears that the driving force was their interest in the unique nature of Paul's message as well as the intellect he wielded. The Athenians, fascinated by various ideas and debating day-to-day, stood in the same role as Socrates, “that pesky philosopher who never left Athens and spent his time in the agora conversing with philosophers and sophists.”⁶⁷ Marshall explains the Athenian curiosity:

There was in Athens a blend of superstitious idolatry and enlightened philosophy. Paul's speech, which is delivered before the philosophers, has often been thought to be rather irrelevant to their concerns, since it was directed more against popular idolatry. In fact, however, it would have been very relevant to Epicureans, who thought it unnecessary to seek after God and had no fear of his judgment, and to Stoics, whose concept of God was pantheistic...what Paul was doing was to side with the philosophers, and then demonstrate that they did not go far enough.⁶⁸

It is with this brief background to the context of Athens, and the ethos of its audience, that we now explore the following apostolic beliefs and practices.

⁶⁵ The *Stoas* were sheltered passageways where philosophers gathered to give or listen to various ideas; the public was permitted to gather and listen there as well.

⁶⁶ Charles K. Barrett, *New Testament Background: Selected Documents: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1995), 832.

⁶⁷ Joshua W. Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as Both Critique and Propaganda", *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 571.

⁶⁸ Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 298.

Characteristics Of Apostolicity In Acts 17:16-34

A Holy Distress

In Acts 17:16 we read, “while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” A rare word in the Greek, *παροξύνω* (“distressed”) is translated as to be irritated, provoked, aroused to anger and exasperated. The same word appears in the passive, “love is not easily angered” (1 Cor 13:5). Stott adds that this word “had medical associations and was used of a seizure or epileptic fit” and therefore concludes “Paul was ‘provoked’ by idolatry, and provoked to anger, grief and indignation, just as God is himself, and for the same reason, namely for the honour and glory of his name.”⁶⁹ Scripture sometimes calls this emotion ‘jealousy’.⁷⁰ What propelled Paul to action was not only a desire to make Christ known, but a holy distress—Paul could not sit idly by as the Athenians suffocated under the weight of idolatry.

Athens itself (named after the goddess Athena) indulged in unrivaled idolatry in its lavish temples and altars, sculptures and statues, rampant buying and selling. Even the name “Athens” had been chosen for the city to be a an offering for the goddess Athena. This clarifies why the word for idolatry (*κατείδωλος*) is superlative, implying that the whole city was “filled with idols”. The KJV reads “wholly given to idols”: they were worshipped as gods, costing precious time, energy and money to be made, bought and sold. The sense is that the city was preoccupied with them from a spiritual as well as mercantile perspective, robbing glory away from the true God and perpetuating a false religion that had to be challenged. J.B. Phillips translates Paul’s

⁶⁹ Stott, 278.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 278.

response in the following way, “his whole soul was revolted at the sight of a city given over to idolatry.”⁷¹

In the next verse we read: “So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (4:17). The particle οὐν, connects Paul’s action with his distress; this is one of the many other biblical examples when righteous indignation created a response— for example with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13).

In this case, however, Paul’s anger stirred him not to declare God’s righteous wrath but to take positive action—meeting with people in the synagogue as well as in the marketplace to declare Christ.

Apostolic Ministry Involves Intentional Engagement

Paul’s initiative in both cities of Thessalonica (17:2) and Athens (17:17) created opportunities with the lost that were conversational and relational. We read in these passages that Paul “went into” (17:2), “reasoned” (17:3), “explained” (17:3) and “reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.” (17:17) The word “reasoned” (διαλέγομαι)—used 14 times in the New Testament—means to argue, discourse, converse and discuss; it includes the idea of intellectual engagement and discourse around the person and work of Jesus.

As we’ll see (in verse 19), Paul’s commitment to intentional relationship-building created access with Athenian philosophers in a region where little to no access had occurred before, certainly with no success on record. Communicating the gospel to outsiders required access to

⁷¹ J. B. Phillips, *New Testament in Modern English* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 155.

people and a level of proximity with people (often repetitively so) as Paul reasoned with people “day by day” (4:17).

Paul was not initially well received, being called a “babbling” (4:18)—like a crow who scavenges off the scraps. Bruce elaborates: “They looked on him as a retailer of secondhand scraps of philosophy, “a picker-up of learning’s crumbs” (like Browning’s Karshish), a type of itinerant peddler of religion not unknown in the Agora, and they used a term of disparaging Athenian slang to describe him.”⁷² This was not only an indictment of him as a trifler in speech, but an assumption that the content of that discourse was no better than the random seed-picking of a bird.

The subsequent line appears to explain a reason for this misunderstanding, namely their unfamiliarity with the person and teaching of Jesus and His resurrection. What Paul proclaimed, they regarded as names of dubious “foreign gods” (4:18) and therefore not to be taken seriously. Had Paul stopped there, the Gospel would have never reached the ears of Dionysius, Damaris and a number of others who came to believe the gospel.

It was, therefore, Paul’s perseverance (in spite of insult) which brought about the opportunity: they brought him into what we can assume was a large gathering—it seems awkward for someone to address a small number as “people of Athens!” (17:22).

From the tone of the passage, most scholars agree that the phrase “they took him in” (17:19) refers not to a violent transport but a consensual one. The fact they brought him into the square of public debate (with a number of people in attendance), infers that their interest was to hear Paul’s provocative ideas, and not nefarious in tone. At its best, they were curious and at its worst they were protecting the people of the city from malevolent teaching. Commenting on this scene in the narrative, Stott writes, “one may therefore regard the situation as ‘an informal

⁷² Bruce, 331.

inquiry by the educating commission’, who regarded him with ‘slightly contemptuous indulgence’ so that ‘he might either receive the freedom of the city to preach or be censored and silenced.’”⁷³

Apostolic Ministry Necessitates Flexibility

In verse 16 we read that while waiting, Paul took action and did not sit idly by; he was always alert, making the most of every opportunity as he told the Colossians:

Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (4:3-6).

On Paul’s positive opportunism, Bruce comments: “Paul was not the man to take a holiday from the main business of his life, so he did not waste away the time while he waited for his friend to rejoin him from the north.”⁷⁴

This conversation, as well as subsequent conversions, occurred because by grace (and through the Spirit’s empowerment), Paul adapted to an unexpected opportunity and made the most of it! He did not need formal engagements or structured appointments but stepped through doors as they opened.

⁷³ Stott, 283-284.

⁷⁴ Bruce, 329.

Apostolic Ministry Necessitates A Thoughtful Rhetoric

There are four important components to the sermon Paul delivers in Acts 17: A planned delivery, an Old Testament foundation, contextualization and the centrality of Jesus and the resurrection.

A Planned Delivery. Many scholars believe the content of the speech was not spontaneous, but one that had been thoughtfully planned before its execution: “it takes the character of deliberative rhetoric, which seeks to convince the audience to change their beliefs and their behavior.”⁷⁵

Schnabel agrees:

Paul’s speech before the Council of the Areopagus is characterized by agreement and contradiction, carefully calibrated in view of the specific audience on Ares Hill. Paul does not want to explain a ‘new Caching’ to the philosophers and council members of Athens that seeks to expand their enlightened knowledge, but a teaching that transcends that knowledge. Paul employs concepts and formulations that reflect Hellenistic concepts and formulations, and at the same time he refers to the convictions and formulations of the Old Testament prophets and of Jewish apologists.”⁷⁶

If this is correct, it neither negates the importance of the Spirit’s work in the process of preparation, nor the brilliance of Paul to articulate the Gospel with an astute awareness of (in Aristotelian terms) its *ethos, logos and pathos*.⁷⁷ In contrast to fellow Jews or God-fearing Greeks (who had a similar epistemology), Athenian intellectuals were one of the most difficult populous to engage *with* the gospel, nevertheless, convince *for* the Gospel. What Paul wrote to the Corinthians could easily be said of the Athenians:

⁷⁵ D. Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens : Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication", *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (2002): 201.

⁷⁶ E. J. Schnabel, "Contextualizing Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel Before Pagan Audiences in the Graeco-Roman World", *Religion & Theology* 12, no. 2 (2005): 183.

⁷⁷ Aristotle describes persuasion as containing three elements: carrying an impression of credibility and amicability (*ethos*), the logic with which one builds an argument (*logos*), and an appeal to the emotions (*pathos*).

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:20-24).

Although the Jews had a synagogue where Paul could preach, Paul knew he must reason with the Athenians and preach the Message of Christ in a way dissimilar to Jews and God-fearing Greeks. However, this was not something Paul was unprepared for; Paul was well-equipped to converse with the Greek mind—living in Tarsus for several years (as we read about in Acts 9:30). With this background, Paul would have been familiar with Stoic philosophy, which was taught in the university at Tarsus. If we were to compare this speech to the one in Acts 13:16-41, we would note definitive similarities (an Old Testament foundation, the centrality of Jesus and the resurrection, an exhortation to respond, etc.) and at least one critical difference: Paul’s use of contextualized language due to a difference in audience. All of this points to a very deliberate, planned speech that may have occurred over a period of days, weeks, months or years, provided by Luke as an example to follow.

As we’ll see in the subsequent exegesis, the passage shows sufficient evidence (what was said, what was not said, how things were said, what was included and not included, the progression of thought, etc.), pointing to a logical conclusion.

An Old Testament Foundation. The biblical-theological approach of Paul, undergirded by Old Testament allusions, appears also in the words of Jewish preachers such as Peter and Stephen, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke.⁷⁸ Paul’s speech in Acts 17 rides on an undercurrent of Jewish words and references that Greeks could understand in their vernacular. When one reads the sermon not as a Greek, but as a Jew (with the Hebraic emphasis of creation, revelation

⁷⁸ Many scholars believe that Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew.

and judgment) it appears that Paul is sharing the gospel with the Old Testament in mind, yet through Greek language and prose:

But would the historical Paul, with his policy of being “all things to all” (1 Cor. 9:22), have tried to win the Athenians from paganism with a Hebraic speech about the knowledge of God? The man who calls himself “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5) was at the same time, from another point of view, a Hellenist of Hellenists. The essential content of the speech is biblical, but the presentation is Hellenistic.⁷⁹

When comparing and contrasting the following Paul’s speech in Acts 17 with Acts 13, and, Peter’s speech in Acts 2 with Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, we see the same dominant themes of creation, revelation and judgment—yet without the expectation that Greeks would have any use for specific names, events to be quoted as Scripturally authoritative. The basis of Paul’s argument to the Athenians is ultimately not the trustworthiness of Scripture (God’s self-revelation through the Word), but general revelation (“He created and gives life and breath to all that is”) the created order (“he has appointed times and seasons for nations to rule”) and eventually to God’s special revelation with judgment coming through “one man”.

Writing on this point, Bock quotes Pohill as stating, “every statement Paul made was rooted in Old Testament thought...this is not the immanent God of philosophy but a God who works in creation.”⁸⁰ The genius of Paul’s words in Acts 17 was not only his use of general revelation as an apologetic, but his abilities to communicate that revelation to Greek ears.

A Contextualized Approach. It is important to first, define “contextualization”:

Contextualization is a dynamic process of the church’s reflection...on the interaction of the text as the word of God and the context as a specific human situation. It is essentially a missiological concept...Contextualization is not a passing fad or a debatable option. It is essential to our understanding of God’s self-revelation.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Bruce, 341.

⁸⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 565-566.

⁸¹ Ferguson, 164.

There are many scholars (Vielhauer, Norden, Gardner, etc.) who are uncomfortable with the difference between Paul's speech in Acts 17 and his other writings—to the extent that they have dismissed this passage as non-Pauline. Fitzmyer quotes Dibelius who goes as far as to say, “the theology of the Areopagus speech is absolutely foreign to Paul's own theology...it is, in fact, foreign to the entire New Testament.”⁸² Other scholars disagree:

The difference in theological emphasis and preaching method between Paul's address to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41) and his address to the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22–31) is but one notable illustration of the sociological and theological inevitability of contextualization. In the history of dogma the affirmations of the truths of God's revelation in Scripture have always involved a selection of themes and contextualized language in response to the particular theological and ethical issues confronting the church in that moment of history. The creeds, confessions and statements of faith reflect this process.⁸³

Assuming that Luke accurately reported Paul's sermon in Acts 17 (whether dictated by Paul or penned by a scribe), the speech effectively adapts the message of the gospel to its listeners—including important allusions to their life and culture—without sacrificing the central message; it is a dialogue in which there are clear points agreement as well as discord—Paul built consensus with his audience and preached a gospel which confronted Athenian idolatry.

Commenting on the former, Schnabel writes:

The point of contact, or agreement, consists in the fact that Paul uses a vocabulary with whom his listeners are familiar, but which gives a new meaning to old words, prodding his listeners instruction in the theology of Israel, Paul uses the intellectual, philosophical and linguistic traditions of his audience: as bridgehead for the proclamation of Jesus the Saviour of the world, since he knows their religious customs and educational values.⁸⁴

There are several other instances in this story when Paul's statements are adapted specifically to the setting and history of those present: In verse 22 we read, “I see you are very

⁸² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 969.

⁸³Ferguson, 164.

⁸⁴ E.J. Schnabel, "Contextualizing Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel Before Pagan Audiences in the Graeco-Roman World", *Religion & Theology* 12, no. 2 (2005): 183-184.

religious (δεισιδαιμονία)—a word that can be used positively (“reverencing of the gods”, “pious”, “religious”) and negatively (“superstitious”). Since Athenians typically frowned upon flattery as a rhetorical device, it is doubtful Paul used this to do so; nor is it likely he wanted to begin by offending them! Thus, it could be that Paul expressed the word in a neutral tone as if to affirm their desire for spiritual inquiry, only to later reveal that they were in fact being “superstitious” by their pursuit of false gods.

The true meaning of the neutral word would become clear in their own self-identification, with Paul’s forthcoming statements that they were ignorant (23), vainly idolatrous (24-25), needing to repent (30) and soon to be judged (31). Barrett adds that, “what was a monument to polytheism, being one statues among many, Paul has turned in a monotheistic direction. Paul’s speech is confrontational, but in a gentle manner. Turning ignorance about spirituality and God into knowledge is Paul’s goal.”⁸⁵

This leads directly into Paul’s next thought: “So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship--and this is what I am going to proclaim to you” (17:23). This introduces with clarity that which lies in obscurity. The aforementioned altar standing as a symbol of their ignorance and misplaced worship.

Paul continues that “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything” (17:24-25). His statement answers the core problem: idols were a means to gain access to the gods, yet the true God cannot be apprehended by such measures. He is the one who made the world, who rules over the world as “Lord”, needing nothing from them. Otherwise stated: the activities of buying, selling, placing, sustaining and

⁸⁵ Barrett , 838.

worshipping idols are in vain. Paul has not said anything new, simply reminding them of what their own people have said.

This is followed by the statement that this same God “gives everyone life and breath and everything else” (4:25). His point here is rather than an attempt to appease the gods, it is God who continually gives everyone life and breath and everything else—God has chosen to give what we have (“life, breath and everything else”). From that line of reasoning, it would be illogical that a God such as this would need to be sustained by our constant offerings:

If he is pleased to accept their service, it is not because he lacks something which they can supply. Here again parallels to Paul’s argument can be adduced from Greek literature and philosophy (Cf. Euripides, *Heracles* 1345-36 (“God, if he be truly God, has need of nothing”); Plato, *Euthyphro* 14C (“What advantage accrues to the gods from what they get from us?”)).⁸⁶

Paul continues to explain that, “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (17:26). God sovereignly set up the ordering of the world and yet by implication, mankind is accountable for living out that vocation according to God’s design. Stott summarizes this idea, stating: “although God cannot be held responsible for the tyranny or aggression of individual nations, yet both the history and the geography of each nation are under his control.”⁸⁷ In fact, God’s ordering was not as the Romans understood—for military conquest, imperialism, education or self-actualization—but “so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him”. The Athenians are seeking to find god through idols, but the true God desires them to seek in His direction:

the two verbs for seeking, “grope” (ψηλαφάω) and “find” (εὕρισκω) are optative, expressing a possibility of finding God...in Acts the expression refers to a spiritual groping after god, to looking for something in an uncertain way...Paul describes the

⁸⁶ Bruce, 337.

⁸⁷ Stott, 286.

Greeks as humans seeking God in their own imperfect way in the hope that they may “get a hold” of God – and this goal is attainable.⁸⁸

The reason the true God is able to be sought and found, is because He “is not far from any one of us” (17:27). Whereas Paul has already stressed the transcendent nature of God as creator, sustainer and sovereign ruler, now he communicates the imminent, personal God who is not far (but by implication, already near!). In other words, we seek, reach out for him who is already at hand to be found! This implies first, that the Areopagites seek vainly what is “far off” because the gods they seek are not like the true God, Who is near; Second, this leads well into the climax of the speech, that God was much nearer than any could even have imagined as He lived, died and rose again! By going from far to near, Paul begins the speech like a cosmic creation meta-narrative, subtly transitioning to an undoubtedly personal micro-narrative directed towards each hearer.

These thoughts are not only coming from Paul of Tarsus— even their own Greek writers and thinkers have affirmed God’s immanence: “For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring” (17:28). The first reference is a quote ascribed to the Cretan poet Epimenides. The second reference is from Aratus, who came from Paul’s home region of Cilicia. By using their own poets, Paul communicates that in creation terms, we live and move and have our being in God because we are His children. This is not, of course, in the more limited New Testament use of theological adoption (as sons and daughters), but in the general revelatory sense of humans receiving their life from God, as children do from their parents. Bruce comments that:

we are, then, the offspring of God, says Paul, not in any pantheistic sense but in the sense of the biblical doctrine of man, as beings created in his own image. There is, indeed, a mighty difference between this relation of men and women to God in the old creation and

⁸⁸ Bock, 567.

that redemptive relation which members of the new creation enjoy through faith as sons and daughters of God “in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).”⁸⁹

It is possible that at this point in the narrative, Dionysius, Damaris and a number of others (perhaps the ones who asked “to hear more on this topic”) were not only intrigued intellectually, but moved spiritually by the idea of a personal God Who understands their need for a God who is both Most *High* as well as Most *Nigh*.

Not only is Paul’s reference to their poets a basis for truth and rapport, it is part of his philosophical reasoning and syllogism; for his next assertion is a logical conclusion: “we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by human design and skill” (17:29). For how could we be the offspring of God if he were merely an object to be captured? It is, as Stott observes, “absurd to think of him as like gold or silver or stone, which are lifeless in themselves and which owe their being to human imagination and art. Paul quotes their own poets to expose their own inconsistency.”⁹⁰ This phrase, though redundant to what was said earlier, sets up his conclusion: there exists a need for repentance due to error (and immanent judgment), and belief in the Resurrected Judge.

Within Paul’s logic there appears an intentional progression from obscurity to clarity, from unknown-ness and superstitious ignorance, to one whom is present and knowable (17:27). This is not merely through the narrative itself but even through the use of specific words. The first word is that Paul uses is that they are “ignorant” (ἀγνοέω), a word from which we derive the term “agnostic”. This word has three nuances in the New Testament, all of which

⁸⁹ Bruce, 340.

⁹⁰ Stott, 287.

are inarguably negative: “to be ignorant, not to know; not to understand, unknown; to err or sin through mistake, to be wrong.”⁹¹

A second example involves the use of pronouns which essentially keep hearers who are already ignorant, in the dark. These pronouns form bookends, so to speak, from “one man” (17:26) referring to Adam, to “the man” (17:31) referring to Christ. By keeping the actual names hidden from the audience, there exists a mysterious quality to their identities—what some conclude is a rhetorical device leading to the enigma’s revelation.⁹²

A final example of Paul’s intentional movement from obscurity to clarity is the use of “Diving Being” (θεῖος) in verse 29, as a pseudonym for God. This was a term used by the Greeks to refer to divine nature, power or providence (but without reference to any particular deity). In this verse as well as 17:30, Paul utilized what several commentators would judge as a poor representation of the God of Israel. However, Paul’s indeterminate words would soon be replaced with greater clarity; what was once veiled both spiritually as well as verbally (through the use of pronouns and dubious references), would now be stated with conspicuity in verses 29-31: that God has raised this man from the dead and therefore proven that through this same man, the world will be judged with justice. Bock adds that “the prepositional phrase ἐν ἀνδρὶ is instrumental and means “by/through a man”...Jesus was named in verse 18 as the subject of Paul’s message.”⁹³

A reminder that the art of contextualization is not merely related to what is *said*, but what is *not* said. There are several biblical terms that are utilized in other sermons in Acts; however,

⁹¹ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1977), 994.

⁹² This is similar to the first chapter of John’s Gospel, in which he gradually unveils the identity of the λόγος building to a climax in 1:17.

⁹³ Bock, 570.

they do not make their way here in Acts 17. Such terms or idea include the name of Jesus, the crucifixion, the forgiveness of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit, to name a few. As a result of Paul's choice to omit these direct references, some scholars conclude that either Paul was not the author (as mentioned earlier) or that he sinfully lacked the courage to speak boldly. Both of these theories are nearsighted, the latter of which being biblically unfounded: if Paul did not shrink back in situations far more violent and threatening than this (as we see in the list of sufferings he presented in 2 Cor. 11), there is no reason to conclude he balked at this far lesser threat!

Commenting on Paul's omission, Flemming writes:

That Paul's preaching of the gospel in Acts 17 highlights the resurrection and not the cross is entirely appropriate for the context, since it is the former that the Athenians questioned him about specifically. The notion of "resurrection from the dead," which implies a *bodily* resurrection, was alien to all forms of Greek thought. The Greeks generally assumed a dichotomy between spirit and matter (including the body), and for many the body was a prison from which to escape at the time of death. Epicureans, for their part, denied the reality of an afterlife altogether, and Stoics had a vague concept of the future that involved the soul's mystical absorption into the cosmos. It is small wonder that the idea of a bodily resurrection would have sounded like anything but "good news" to most of the Areopagus assembly.⁹⁴

To summarize, Paul communicates the Gospel from a Jewish perspective, but with Hellenistic language and prose. By way of metaphor, while changes the wrapping of the box (the language), he keeps the precious theological content of the Gospel very much untouched:

He does not quote Hebrew Scriptures which would have been quite unknown to his hearers; the direct quotations in this speech are quotations from Greek poets. But he does not condescend to his hearers' level by arguing from first principles as one of their own philosophers might do. His argument is firmly based on biblical revelation; it echoes throughout the thought, and at times the very language of the Old Testament. Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ D. Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens : Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication", *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (2002): 206.

⁹⁵ Bruce, 335.

The Centrality of Jesus and resurrection

The message of Jesus is central in Paul's mind as he builds towards the climax of his discourse. Having stated that all men come from one man (Adam), Paul bookends the speech by concluding that it is also by one man (Jesus) that all will be judged. According to Paul, the proof of the latter man's right, was His resurrection from the dead.

It is important to note that within this relativistic and pluralistic Athenian context, Paul does not spend his time with ontological or epistemological arguments regarding absolute truth; he does not approach them from the reliability of Scripture. Rather, he proclaims a call for repentance based upon the proof of Jesus' resurrection, as Desmond and Rosner state, "From Pentecost onwards, the focal point of apostolic preaching was the resurrection of Jesus, which vindicates him as Lord and Messiah and necessitates human repentance and transformed faith."⁹⁶

Yet juxtaposed with the good news of the resurrection, Paul asserts the need for repentance due to Athenian idolatry and the threat of immanent judgment;⁹⁷ he introduces this in a very careful way (in light of Eph. 4:15), but does so with immediacy because "in the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (17:30).

The patient suspension of wrath is a reoccurring Pauline theme, for example: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). The gospel includes not only the good news of what we're offered in Christ, but what it will cost here on earth (repentance) and at Jesus' return (judgment): "We learn from Paul that we cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without the creation, or salvation without judgment. Today's

⁹⁶ Alexander, 201.

⁹⁷ See Schnabel's work (p. 171 ff.) where he states Paul criticized pagan idolatry in seven respects.

world needs a bigger gospel, the full gospel of Scripture, what Paul later in Ephesus was to call “the whole purpose of God.”⁹⁸

Apostolic Ministry Bears Fruit

The final characteristic of apostolicity is found in verse 34: “some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.” Several scholars attest that the small number of converts indicate a failed mission. This line of reasoning ignores the context of Athenian intellectual hubris, the ambiguous reference to “a number of others”, as well as the ambiguous number of people who were in attendance; indeed, perhaps a majority of those listening became converts, some over time. We do not know.

This is Fitzmyers’ conclusion: “He has little success in Athens...this lack of success is again part of what Paul has to suffer on behalf of Jesus’ name.”⁹⁹ Others such as Joseph Pathrapankal, summarize that Paul changed his approach with subsequent endeavors (for example, the Corinthians) because Paul came to terms with a misplaced emphasis upon rational thought with the Athenians:

...the story of Paul's preaching in nearby Corinth not long after the Areopagus debacle, and Paul's own personal sharing of his attitude during his visit to Corinth as related in his First Letter to the Corinthians, give us some useful insights into a paradigm shift in the methodology of mission, a shift from the power of knowledge to the power of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Stott, 290.

⁹⁹ Fitzmyer, 603.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Pathrapankal, "From Areopagus to Corinth (Acts 17:22-31; I Cor 2:1-5): a study on the transition from the power of knowledge to the power of the Spirit", *Mission Studies* 23, no. 1 (2006): 68-69.

I find it highly unlikely that Paul changed his approach to missions because of alleged failure, but as a result of the context of Corinthian spirituality.¹⁰¹

On the contrary, Stott writes of his “supposed failure in Athens”;¹⁰² Bruce commends that “the idea, popular with many preachers, that his determination, when he arrived in Corinth, to “know nothing” there “except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), was the result of disillusionment with the line of approach he had attempted in Athens, has little to commend it.”¹⁰³ What we know for certain is that a number of hearers also became believers, including Dionysius (a member of the Areopagus) and Damaris. Tradition records that Dionysius became the first bishop of Corinth, and there exist writings addressed to a person with this name in this time period: “Clearly the addressees of the *Epistles* and the claims of the author point to his identity with Dionysius the Areopagite of Acts 17:34. This view prevailed by 649, when the Lateran Council, summoned in Rome against Monotheletism (see Christology), appealed to the writings as accredited theological witnesses.”¹⁰⁴ Though it is unclear whether or not there was an actual church that emerged out of Athens, what remains is the benefit this narrative has offered its readers over time, even today; for that fact alone, it is priceless.

Part Five: Conclusion

This chapter’s research has been indispensable. The result has been a renewed understanding of God’s immutable commitment to sending, and being sent. This commitment,

¹⁰¹ See 1 Cor. 12 and 14 for the Corinthian proclivity towards gifts and works of the Spirit.

¹⁰² Stott, 290.

¹⁰³ Bruce, 344.

¹⁰⁴ Ferguson, 542.

proven over three millennia—through Kings, prophets, Israel, the apostles, the Church, and (above all these in Eminence) His only Son—is resoundingly clear.

Of equitable value has been research related to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, which communicated among other things: the need for giftedness to be exercised with a Christ-like character; the confidence we can have they have been given by Christ himself to each one, secured through his victory over evil; their unique, interdependent and purposeful nature.

Luke's narrative provided us with encouragement and guidance to follow the example of Paul: that positive effects can follow a holy distress; the necessity of intentional engagement and flexibility; the benefits of a thoughtful rhetoric, and the fruit that, God-willing, accompanies our faithful action.

We now turn back in time to the 5th century in order to explore the beliefs, principles, patterns of behavior and practices of the Celtic Christian movement under Saint Patrick.

CHAPTER 3—SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: CHARACTERISTICS OF APOSTOLICITY—THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT UNDER ST. PATRICK

This chapter will examine the Celtic Christian movement under Saint Patrick in order to explore apostolic principles and practices. Patrick stands out as one who, first, fits our definition (in chapter 1) almost to perfection and, second, as one who has a narrative that is engaging and inspiring. More so, Patrick reached a group who are so different than his aristocratic roots in such a way that we can find great instruction and encouragement as we seek to reach others unlike ourselves today. Thus, Patrick and his converts demonstrate principles and practices that are necessary to overcome barriers that are not only spiritual in nature, but social and cultural as well.

This chapter will overview Patrick’s life and ministry in five parts: Ireland in Patrick’s day; an overview of Patrick’s life; Patrick’s beliefs; Patrick’s practices; conclusion.¹⁰⁵

Part One: Ireland in Patrick’s Day

Ireland appeared to be one of the few remaining countries that had not been colonized by Rome. As close as it was to England (one of Rome’s ‘crown jewels’), Ireland was surprisingly untouched by Caesar’s rule, that is, unless you understand Ireland, and the Irish, at this point in history. At the time of Patrick, Ireland had no unified government; rather, it had a series of settlements or clans, typically ruled by a tribal king. Such settlements - often stick-and-mud huts

¹⁰⁵ We know about Patrick’s life through four primary documents: The *Declaration*, a letter written by Patrick that provides a brief account of his life, and explanation of his ministry (this includes his defense against charges levied by English clergy); the *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*, a response to a Roman officer, whom Patrick held responsible for the murder and capture of Irish converts to Christianity; Bishop Tirechan’s, *Account of Patrick’s Journey*, and Muirchu’s, *Life of Patrick*. The latter two seventh-century documents include what many historians consider hagiographic embellishment (a hagiography is a genre of literature which often merges historical information with pseudolegendarly stories, heroic acts, and legendary portraits of figures; a mixture of historical and spurious content). As a result, quotations from the latter two writings are used only sparsely, and only considered factual when they confirm existing information about Patrick’s life or time-period.

built in proximity - could be as small as a dozen families, or as large as several hundred. As one can imagine, it was not uncommon for conflicts to erupt among clans over livestock, land, love and liberty. As a result, clans were either victorious and survived, were destroyed and disappeared, or were assimilated into other conquering clans.

There were no written laws (that would assume there was a government to enforce them), but rather, local customs regulating how clans, and Irish society was to operate. Speaking to this fact, Hanson writes:

The country to which he was sent was not at first sight a promising one for a man of Patrick's background. It had never been conquered by the Romans, and in consequence had no writing, no coinage, no Roman roads, no market towns, no uniform system of law nor administration, and no system of education comparable to that of Britain... There was no such thing as the High-King... no single state, centralized or federal or other.¹⁰⁶

The Celts were fierce warriors who fought in ways that were non-traditional and terrifying to the "civilized", especially when one considers their practice of rushing at opponents unclothed, and head-taking which "was a normal feature of Irish tribal warfare."¹⁰⁷ As a result, Ireland was independent, prosperous (compared with desert people) and unscathed by the tyrannical reach of ambitious neighbors. The lush and mountainous terrain providing as much topographical protection from warring invaders, like a natural fortress, as it did beauty. Irish dialect differed geographically as one might expect, but one common tongue unified the land.¹⁰⁸

Making matters more complex for Roman attempts at expansion, Ireland had no written language; communication was near impossible until Patrick's monasteries began codifying an

¹⁰⁶ R.P. C. Hanson, "The Mission of Saint Patrick", *Celtic Christianity* 22-44, no. 1 (1989): 35.

¹⁰⁷ William Henry Scott, "Celtic Culture and the Conversion of Ireland", *International Review of Mission* 56, no. 222 (April, 1967): 194.

¹⁰⁸ Linguists identify this as a form of primitive Irish, found on early fragments in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

identifiable written language.¹⁰⁹ Missionary movements (including the Church in England) had come to Ireland before Patrick's time; however, because of various impervious barriers such as language and culture, what foreigners established were merely enclaves that did little to permeate Irish culture, and replicate Christianity in an indigenous way. Cahill eloquently summarizes that: "Patrick found a way of swimming down to the depths of the Irish psyche and warming and transforming Irish imagination – making it more humane and noble, while keeping it Irish."¹¹⁰

Culturally and spiritually, Ireland and the Celts in particular, were considered "barbaric" by the Romans. Rome could not understand the mysterious druidic warriors, and could neither control nor conquer them as a result. This is because – in addition to the geographical and cultural separation – the Celts looked religiously primitive to the Roman academic and intellectual mind. The "texts" of the Celts – so to speak – were not the philosophers, poets or thinkers of the day, but nature itself. Historians have described Celtic spirituality as "druidic", "pagan" and "animistic", to name a few. Regarding the latter, Scott writes: "animism, the belief that natural objects are inhabited by spiritual forces which can be petitioned for prosperity and involved for fortune-telling or malediction, was dignified as a systematized religion...the theology of everyday life, and as such had a tenacious hold on the Irish imagination."¹¹¹ For the Celts, nature spoke both gently as well as harshly; nature was silent, quiet and numinous. Nature was as god as it held back rain from much-needed crops; it was as god when by flood, it swept away the unfortunate.

¹⁰⁹ Though Patrick does not use the term directly in his works, the term was more common immediately after his death, for travelling monks were often the missionary evangelists who travelled abroad.

¹¹⁰ Cahill, 115.

¹¹¹ Scott, 197.

As a result of the fact that Irish life was oral and not written, they held few, if any, traditions or customs in common with other nations. Though there is evidence that trading occurred with countries both near and far, with so little in common, others had a difficult time finding mutual ground upon which to build rapport, or explain religious conversion.

However, despite these dissimilarities between Roman and Irish religion, there was one belief which the Irish did share with Rome—the polyamorous gods both nations appealed to, and appeased. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to various gods who ruled everything from rain to war. In Irish folklore, spells, incantations and tales of phase-shifting carried with them an equal amount of fear and desperation, as they also offered hope.¹¹² The sense we get in Rome is pantheistic confusion, covered with a veneer of snobbish intellectualism; the sense we get in Ireland is fear and superstition as a result of nature’s pernicious pantheistic deities, passed down through generations of fireside fables, tales, stories and lore.

As a final note, an important class must be mentioned—that of the druid, who among other things were “wandering preachers who traveled around, passing on their teaching to whomever would receive it.”¹¹³ They were not only learned, but they held an important place of authority within Celtic life, including political influence alongside chieftains. As Swisher writes,

They were the medieval scholars and pagan priests, some specialists in physics, astronomy, astrology, geology, natural theology and even medicine...believed to have incredible magical powers... Druid priests exerted extensive influence and authority...Their decisions and judgments were absolute and final...Even the tribal chieftains obeyed the advice and prophecies of these religious leaders.¹¹⁴

This was the land out of which Patrick emerged, and the people to whom Patrick returned.

¹¹² The Celts believed that gods could shift their appearance, taking the form of a material object or person.

¹¹³ Michael T. Cooper, “Missiologiical Reflections on Celtic Christianity: Implications for Ministry in Western Culture”, *Mission Studies* 20, no. 2 (2003): 37.

¹¹⁴ Swisher, David J. "Evangelizing post-moderns: a Celtic model." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47, no. 2 (September 2012): 183.

Part Two: An Overview of Patrick's Life

Patrick was born in Roman Britain, probably near the coast. The generally accepted date for Patrick's birth is 387 C.E, though there are other theories. His father, Calpernius, was a member of the British aristocracy; Patrick lived a comfortable life in what would have been a Romanesque compound with several buildings, servants and attendants. In his *Declaration*, Patrick writes about the classical Roman education he received (but was not able to complete) in his youth. Later in life, Patrick recounts that as a boy, he was disinterested and negatively predisposed towards religion, thinking of priests as "foolish". Significantly, Patrick grew up in a very devout family with his father ordained as a deacon, and his grandfather, a priest.

When he was about 16, Patrick was captured by Irish raiders, brought to Ireland and sold into servitude to a druidic tribal chief named Miliuc. There he lived as a slave for six difficult years until his early twenties. In his writings, Patrick speaks of long days herding cattle, suffering in constant cold, hunger and isolation, being overwhelmed by the elements of wind, rain and snow, and feeling abandoned by God as well as punished for his sins.

It was in the midst of this sad estate, surrounded by the cruelty and beauty of nature, that Patrick began to pray. As Pat Egan so intuitively communicates:

One of the things that struck me when reading an account of his life as a teenager, was that he, at my own age, had lost everything – country, family, social position, wealth, language, freedom – his entire worldly identity. He was alone in a country that spoke a language he didn't initially understand. There was no one to talk to unless he chose to speak with God.¹¹⁵

Initially, we can imagine he prayed about the weather, the constant experience of fear and suffering, as well as his daily need for food, sustenance and companionship. However, Patrick's prayers changed as he began to pray about his ingratitude, sin and rebellion—growing in his

¹¹⁵ Patricia Colling Egan, "Spirit Set in Motion: A Fifth-Century Landscape of St. Patrick's Mission to Ireland", *Road to Emmaus* 12, no. 2 (2011), 62.

devotion and love for God. Whereas prayer began as a way to better his situation, what emerged for at least the next five decades was communion with God, as a way of life. It was his frequent and ardent prayer life that Patrick credits for his survival during this difficult time:

I prayed a number of times each day. More and more the love and fear of God came to me, and faith grew and my spirit was exercised, until I was praying up to a hundred times every day - and in the night nearly as often. So that I would even remain in the woods and on the mountain in snow, frost and rain, waking to pray before first light. And felt no ill effect, nor was I in any way sluggish - because as I now realize, the Spirit was seething within me.¹¹⁶

Patrick wrote that one night, God spoke to him, saying, “It is good that you fast, who will soon go to your homeland...look! Your ship is ready.”¹¹⁷ Soon thereafter, Patrick fled on foot, travelling 200 miles towards the coast, where he was able to remain uncaptured, eventually boarding a ship. After a short voyage, the party travelled on land for 28 days (some scholars attest they were in western France), after which they ran out of food. The ship’s captain then mocked Patrick by saying, “What's this Christian? You say your God is great and all-powerful. Then why can't you pray for us? For we are all in danger of dying of hunger.”¹¹⁸ Patrick replied, “trust in the Lord my God and turn to him with all your hearts - since nothing is impossible for him - that He may send you today more than sufficient food for your journey - for He has an abundance everywhere.”¹¹⁹ To their amazement, a herd of pigs appeared crossing the road, and their lives were spared. This miraculous intervention was, to Patrick, an early testimony of God’s providence not only to preserve life, but declare his power.

¹¹⁶ All references to Patrick’s writings are taken from Liam de Poar, *Saint Patrick’s World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

¹¹⁷ Paor, 99.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 99.

Patrick was eventually able to return home to be with his parents. However, sensing a call to the clergy and education, he left to study for the priesthood and was ordained, possibly serving as a cleric in England. It is unclear where he studied, or how long this period in his life lasted. Walking home, Patrick had a vision at night, and a man named Victoricus delivered a letter from Ireland which read in the heading, “The Voice of the Irish”:

As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Foclut, which is beside the western sea - and they cried out, as with one voice: ‘We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.’ I was pierced by great emotion and could not read on, and so I awoke. Thank God that after many years the Lord answered them according to their cry.¹²⁰

After an uncertain amount of time, Patrick was ordained Bishop and commissioned by the Church of England, as an apostle to the Irish. His name at this time was likely changed to Patrick, for—as a Roman agnomen—“Patricius” infers an honorific title given by a superior.¹²¹ Most scholars estimate that in 432, he arrived in Ireland. From this point, Patrick would spend what most historians estimate was three decades (passing away in 461) devoted to the people who once enslaved him. At the end of his life it is commonly accepted that a third of Ireland had been converted.

Part Three: Patrick’s Apostolic Beliefs

Having received a picture of Celtic life in Patrick’s day, as well as an overview of his life, we now look at the beliefs and practices that made his movement apostolically effective. These beliefs include the Scriptures, the Triune God, a creedal faith and profound sense of calling.

¹²⁰ Paor, 100.

¹²¹ Pat Egan explores this in greater detail in her article on pages 55-56.

The Scriptures

It is clear from Patrick's works, as well as those who wrote about him, that he believed in the efficacy of the Scriptures, relying upon them as his primary source of inspiration and authority. In fact, looking at his writings and ministry, we see a robust biblical and theological foundation that undergirded them both. Timothy Joyce describes Patrick as being "penitential and ascetic. He engages in continuous and repetitive prayer. He is ever more and more passionately in love with God. He loves sacred scripture. He is close to the God of nature. He has a rich, poetic imagination with the openness to hear God in vision and dream."¹²²

On this subject, Bausch refers to Maire B. de Paor, whose analysis of Patrick's works yielded over 550 biblical references in Patrick's *Confession*, and over 100 more in his *Letter to Coroticus*.¹²³ Referring to Patrick's writings, Timothy Joyce states, "They are enmeshed in the scriptures, revealing a profound knowledge of the Bible. Many scriptural quotes are simply entwined in his sentences as he recalled them without explicitly quoting them. The Epistle to the Romans is one of the books of the Bible he quotes most often."¹²⁴

The Triune God

This belief in the Scriptures led to Patrick's belief in the Trinity, however, even before Patrick's arrival, the Irish already had developed a fascination with the number three; it existed in their songs, religious life, customs and art. Thus, the idea of God as Triune was not suspect,

¹²² Joyce, 32.

¹²³ Lawrence Bausch, *Irish Conversion-From St. Patrick to 700 A.D.: A Study of the Relationship between Gospel and Culture* (Carrollton, TX: Ekklesia Society, 2007), 31.

¹²⁴ Timothy J. Joyce, *Celtic Christianity: A Sacred Tradition, a Vision of Hope* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1998), 31.

but a powerful apologetic that could be built upon. In his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, George Hunter writes:

The doctrine of the Trinity became the foundational paradigm for Celtic Christianity. The doctrine informed people's piety as well as the theologians' theories. The understanding of God as a unity of three persons, bound together in love, became the Celtic model for the Christian community; the understanding of God as a family of three persons defined the Christian family.¹²⁵

This explains the deep Trinitarian roots in Celtic spirituality, as well as what tradition reports as Patrick's use of the shamrock (three-leaf clover) to explain the Trinity, conflating Patrick's desire to explain the doctrine of the Trinity with his strategy for preaching. Such a strategy was both theologically and rhetorically contextual, utilizing nature (and natural revelation) to explain biblical truth. This is summarized well in Monaghan's book:

The Celts had a philosophical and cosmological vision of triplicity, with many of their divinities appearing in three. Thus when St. Patrick, attempting to convert the Druids on Beltane, held up a shamrock and discoursed on the Christian Trinity, the three-in-one God, he was doing more than finding a homely symbol for a complex religious concept. He was indicating knowledge of the significance of three in the Celtic realm, a knowledge that probably made his mission far easier and more successful than if he had been unaware of that number's meaning.¹²⁶

A Creedal Faith

Patrick's theological underpinnings appear to have been formed through not only the Scriptures, but a creedal faith. Although we have no evidence Patrick utilized the creed that emerged a century before at the Council of Nicaea, we have evidence (through a writing within his *Declaration* as well as his allusion to it as a "rule of faith of the Trinity") that he thought and

¹²⁵ George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism, Tenth Anniversary Edition: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 82.

¹²⁶ Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York, N.Y.: Checkmark Books, 2008), 132.

communicated in a creedal way.¹²⁷ This is important (not because we should require our historical figures to know and practice the early creeds, in a legalistic sense), because the creeds represent a summary of Christian doctrine, and confirms that Patrick viewed truth in a unified way. Patrick's faith was not merely based on subjective experience, but objective transcendent truth that contained much of the same tone, language and doctrinal veracity of the early creeds.

We can hear this creedal tone in Patrick's own words:

Because there is no other God, nor has there been, nor will there be in the future, other than God the Father, begotten without beginning, from Whom all things begin, Who governs all things, as we have been taught; and His Son Jesus Christ. Whom we testify to have been manifestly with the Father always, to have been spiritually with the Father since before the beginning of time, to have been born of the Father before the beginning in a way that cannot be described. And by Him were made things visible and invisible. He was made man, Having vanquished death He was taken back into heaven and earth and hell, so that every tongue should confess to Him that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. We believe in Him and expect His coming in the near future as Judge of the living and the dead, Who will make return to all according to what they have done. He poured out abundantly on us the Holy Spirit, the gift and pledge of immortality, Who makes of obedient believers sons of God and co-heirs of Christ. We confess and adore Him as one God in the Trinity of the Holy Name.¹²⁸

A Profound Sense of Calling

Among Patrick's core beliefs, was a profound sense of calling. In his own words, Patrick acknowledged that his experiences of capture, slavery, and suffering were not simply prior to his call, but a necessary preparation for it. Russell Huizing summarizes: "Patrick looked back on his life and saw a long thread of grace that ran through it coupled with the visionary revelation... It was in this way that he saw his cross-cultural ministry as something that did not come from

¹²⁷ Hanson, 39.

¹²⁸ Paor, 96-97.

himself but instead was the direct work and reflection of the character of God.”¹²⁹ For Patrick, his calling was not only one to come to Christ, but one that compelled him to act in the world, for the sake of Christ. Patrick reflects upon his captivity, and calling, in this way:

I was barely sixteen. I had neglected the true God, and when I was carried off into captivity in Ireland, along with a great number of people, it was well deserved. For we cut ourselves off from God and did not keep His commandments, and we disobeyed our bishops who were reminding us of our salvation. God revealed His being to us through His wrath: He scattered us among foreign peoples, even to the end of the earth, where, appropriately, I have my own small existence among strangers. Then the Lord made me aware of my unbelief, so that – however late – I might recollect my offences and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God. It was He Who took heed of my insignificance, Who pitied my youth and ignorance, Who watched over me before I knew Him and before I came to understand the difference between good and evil, and Who protected and comforted me as a father would a son. That is why I cannot remain silent (further, it would be inappropriate to do so) about the great favours and graces which the Lord deigned to grant me in the land of my captivity. For the way to make repayment for that revelation of God through capture and enslavement is to declare and make known His wonders to every race under heaven.¹³⁰

In this paragraph, Patrick understood his suffering to be redemptive and productive, speaking of those years as “favours” and “graces”, with a “revelation of God”. Such grace came not despite, but through his capture and enslavement, forming Patrick’s character and prayer life, which, for many of the Irish (as will explore later), would authenticate his message. Eventually, we will see that Patrick’s godly character was confirmed not only through his prayer life, but through the opposition he experienced from the Celts, as well as from his fellow clergy. With this understanding of Patrick’s beliefs, we now turn to his practices.

Part Four: Patrick’s Apostolic Practices

¹²⁹ Russell L. Huizing, “Beyond Shamrocks and Snakes: St. Patrick’s Cross-Cultural Leadership”, *Evangelical Journal* 31, no. 2 (September 2013): 78.

¹³⁰ Paor, Liam. *World*, 96.

In addition to beliefs, Patrick and his followers were effective in reaching those outside of their community through the use of seven core practices. These include identification, an intentional approach, contextual ministry, an adaptive pastoral theology, the development of Celtic Christian lifestyles, their release into mission, and their response to conflict.

Identification

The first practice of Patrick was identification with the Irish people, which occurred on three levels: living, learning and loving.

Living. Through his captivity, Patrick was able to live the life of the Celts, the very people to whom he would reach out, in the same way God reached out to him (through nature and natural revelation). In contrast to his former life with parents, servants, fellow students and teachers, Patrick lived most of his life of captivity, outdoors (in the midst of nature, isolated and alone), with few people with whom to interact. Therefore, it was in the fields and forests of Ireland that Patrick was not only dependent on nature for sustenance but also companionship: “He sensed the winds, the seasons, the creatures, and the nights under the stars the presence of God; he identified this presence with the Triune God he had learned about in the catechism.”¹³¹

From that experience, Patrick could better understand and identify with the Celtic dependence upon, and worship of nature as the voice of God himself.¹³² Ironically, Patrick would use that same medium (of nature and God’s revelation through His creation), to proclaim the Gospel. This agrees with Michael Cooper’s findings: “Celtic Christianity did not see Platonic dualism in creation as it related to pre-Christian Celts. Instead it affirmed the goodness of the

¹³¹ Hunter, 14.

¹³² Psalm 98:7-8 is an example of this: Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD.

created world as a gift of God.”¹³³ Instead of despising druidic worship, Patrick could understand, and utilize their worship as a way to explain the true God. Patrick’s words confirm this reality, as recorded in Tirechan’s *Account*:

Our God is the God of all people, the God of heaven and earth, of the sea and of the rivers, the God of the sun and the moon and the stars, the God of the high mountains and of the deep valleys. He is God above heaven and in heaven and under heaven, and has as his dwelling place heaven and earth and the sea and all that are in them. His life is in all things; he makes all things live; he governs all things; he supports all things. He kindles the light of the sun; he builds the light and the manifestations of the night; he makes wells in arid land and dry islands in the sea, and he set the stars in place to serve the major lights... Truly, now, since you are daughters of an earthly king, I wish that you will believe and I wish to wed you to the king of heaven.¹³⁴

Rather than focus merely upon what was broken in nature, Patrick affirmed what He saw of God in nature. As George Hunter confirms: “Celtic Christianity believed that the natural world was created good and, though the Fall introduced sin and evil in the natural order, it was still essentially God’s good creation.”¹³⁵ The life Patrick once lived and discovered God within nature, would be the very means through which he would communicate the reality of the life of God.

Learning. Second, in addition to living with the Irish, Patrick was able to learn from them: their language, customs, values and beliefs; not merely as an observer, but as a participant. Patrick was able to do so despite the prejudice of his upbringing, and Rome’s indifference to the Celts. As stated before, there were many reasons for Rome’s caricature of the Irish as “barbarian”, to which George Hunter adds: “the church assumed that reaching barbarians was impossible; a population, by definition, had to be literate and rational enough to understand

¹³³ Cooper, 42.

¹³⁴ As quoted in Bausch, Fr Lawrence. *Irish Conversion*, 84.

¹³⁵ Hunter, 88.

Christianity, and cultured and civil enough to become real Christians if they did understand it...Romans tended to regard everyone who wasn't culturally Roman as 'barbarian.'"¹³⁶ It was as much the fact that the Romans could not apprehend, understand or control the Celts, that ultimately rendered their Irish neighbors as "barbarian".

In direct contrast, Patrick was able to overcome obstacles that had prevented the success of missionaries before him. He lived in and among the Celtic people; he learned their morals, mores and values, he understood, in time, their traditions and the history behind various eccentricities and oddities. More so, with his intuitive intellect, he was able to see the brokenness in Celtic family and societal life, and likely, why it was broken; what was evil and twisted but also, what - in their society, family structure and culture - was inherently good and beautiful. Yet by way of reminder, Patrick's point of reference was not as a respected member of society, a position that would have hindered others from believing his message. Rather, his identity was as the lowest of the Celts, because aliens and slaves were not even considered a part of Irish society, with no legitimate claim on anything, including their own lives. As such, they could be used for any purpose, however malevolent, with no rights or claims for justice.

Despite this, Patrick did not loathe the Celts, he learned from them. Hunter concludes: "the fact that Patrick understood the people and their language, their issues, and their ways, serves as the most strategically significant single insight that was to drive the wider expansion of Celtic Christianity, and stands as perhaps our greatest single learning from this movement. There is no shortcut to understanding the people."¹³⁷

Loving. As a result of Patrick's godly disposition, he was able to go beyond living and learning, to loving the Celts. This was the case even in the midst of violent opposition to his

¹³⁶ Hunter, 19.

¹³⁷ Hunter, 19-20.

message and ministry. Joyce writes, “Patrick came to love this very people who had enslaved him, even though he was chained and imprisoned at least once more as a bishop. He was undaunted in energy, baptizing thousands, ordaining many priests, and caring for the poor.”¹³⁸ Since Patrick was able to understand their culture, he would eventually see pathways for the Gospel within their culture; not simply the verbal message of Jesus, but the holistic good news that would provide compassion and help. These areas included illiteracy, poverty and slavery, which Patrick worked to resolve for the remainder of his life: “he worried constantly for the people, not just for their spiritual but for their physical welfare. The horror of slavery was never lost on him.”¹³⁹ In fact, Timothy Joyce comments that Patrick’s sense of identification as Irish (not English), emerged in his *Letter to Coroticus*, in which he pleads for the release of new Irish converts:

Patrick, operating at the margins of European geography and of human consciousness, has traveled even further from his birthright than we might expect. He is no longer British or Roman, at all. When he cries out in his pain, ‘Is it a shameful thing...that we have been born in Ireland?’ we know that he has left the old civilization behind forever and has identified himself completely with the Irish.¹⁴⁰

An Intentional Approach

In addition to Patrick’s practice of identification, he was able to reach them through an intentional approach. After receiving a clear call from God to return to Ireland, it is likely that the details of his return would have occupied Patrick’s mind on a constant basis, especially with years to think, seek counsel and pray. Such details probably included the fears of being enslaved

¹³⁸ Joyce, 31.

¹³⁹ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York, NY: Anchor, 1996), 109.

¹⁴⁰ Joyce, 113.

again (which did occur, according to Patrick's *Declaration*), or killed. Yet, most prominent in his mind would have likely been, the matter of how to reach the Celts. What we see that Patrick accomplished upon his return appears to have been a thoughtful, intentional approach— involving aspects such as proximity, access and rapport—which led to the movement's success.

Patrick understood the importance of the settlement system, with its custom that visiting strangers were respectfully and humbly (often with gifts), to make initial contact with the tribal king. Thus, Patrick would engage the leadership of the settlement and work for their conversion or at the very least, their compliance. This would allow (or disallow), Patrick access to the village, so that he could plant a community of faith close nearby. A consistent factor in their success was the proximity of the Christian community to the settlement itself, with frequent access between Christians and the people there (and vice-versa).

As was their custom, members of the Christian community would enter into the settlement frequently - for days, weeks and months - in order to engage villagers in ongoing conversation. This type of converse, as one can imagine, was not initiated by "lone ranger" evangelists, but a team working together, leveraging various gifts and personalities.

Contextual Ministry

Once Patrick and his followers had made contact and established a level of initial rapport, contextual ministry occurred through a variety of means.¹⁴¹ This included practical help such as feeding the poor, caring for, and healing the sick, and praying for others' practical needs and concerns. Several instances are recorded by Patrick (and of Patrick) with prayers being made for abundant harvests, catches of fish, and the resolution of various conflicts. This was "street-level

¹⁴¹ On page 34 of the book, *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, Craig Van Gelder explains contextual ministry by stating that "congregations are responsible for translating the good news of the Gospel...into every cultural context they encounter."

ministry”, similar to Paul’s daily conversations in Athens with “whoever happened to be there” (Acts 17:17). This daily interaction would have enabled Patrick and his followers to listen and minister to the real and tangible needs of villagers.

In addition to daily discourse, Patrick and his followers communicated Christianity to Celtic culture, by creating “outlets for expressing their constructive emotions through indigenous oratory, storytelling, poetry, music, dance, drama, etc. in God’s service.”¹⁴² This provided a cultural bridge – giving both groups something to enjoy and share together that they held in common – that capitalized on the nature-centric imaginations of the Irish. Commenting on this, Hunter states:

In reaching them, Christianity adapted remarkably from its earlier Roman reliance upon words, propositions, concepts, and theological abstractions. Ian Bradley reports that Celtic ‘Christianity was rooted more in the imagination than the intellect, and spoke in images more than in concepts. Celtic Christians leaders excelled at expressing their faith in symbols, metaphors and images, both visual and poetic. They had the ability to...paint pictures in words, signs and music that acted as icons opening windows in heaven and pathways to eternity...They have much to teach Christians today seeking to rekindle their imaginative faculties.’”¹⁴³

Another example of Patrick’s contextual rhetoric, was his redirection of the “warrior mentality” away from Celtic proclivities towards violence and war (which were often reinforced through generational stories of perniciously violent gods and goddesses), to its Christian replacement.¹⁴⁴ Patrick had to do so, without dismantling positive aspects of their culture, such as the telling of stories and lore. He, in fact, accomplished this by introducing,

in his own person, a living alternative. It is possible to be brave – to expect ‘every day...to be murdered, betrayed, enslaved – whatever may come my way’ – and yet be a man of peace and at peace, a man without sword or desire to harm, a man in whom the sharp fear of death has been smoothed away. He was ‘not afraid of any of these things,

¹⁴² Hunter, 70.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴⁴ A term that Cahill used to describe the Celtic inclination towards violence.

because of the promises of heaven; for I have put myself in the hands of God almighty.’¹⁴⁵

Patrick’s redirection was apparently successful, as Timothy Joyce reports that the Celtic warrior mentality eventually graduated into an emphasis on the discipline and rigors of ascetic and penitential life (what became known as ‘green martyrdom’, in contrast to the ‘red martyrdom’ of war).¹⁴⁶

In large part, Patrick’s genius was first, to listen – which involved also intuition, perception and inquiry – then to speak. His speaking was contextual, involving what George Hunter articulates through the Aristotelian rhetorical classifications of “ethos, logos and pathos”. Ethos is “whether or not the speaker can be trusted”, it includes “intelligence, character and good will” as well as personal attributes such as honesty, credibility and identification—attributes that Patrick clearly possessed.¹⁴⁷ This was character that, with “his own words this Apostle speaks of his conversions, baptisms and ordinations in Ireland with obvious humility and no less obvious affection, and not the slightest innuendo betrays any sense of patronizing superiority or paternalism.”¹⁴⁸

The second concept, logos, is the logical flow and argument that the speaker builds. Although Patrick moved in a way that was very sensitive to Celtic culture, his message emphasized the need for repentance, conversion, salvation and mortification (as well as sanctification and perseverance by grace). Russell Huizing summarizes that St Patrick “communicated the grace of God through redemption in Jesus, the call on all humanity to respond in faith and love, and the reality of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to live out that

¹⁴⁵ Cahill, 128.

¹⁴⁶ For further discussion of this topic, see Timothy Joyce, page 36.

¹⁴⁷ Hunter, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Scott, 146.

faith in obedience.”¹⁴⁹ We see evidence of this in Patrick’s own personal piety, as expressed in

His Declaration:

Strong is the enemy who tries every day to turn me away from the faith and purity of that true religion to which I have devoted myself to the end of my life for Christ my Lord. My uncooperative body is forever dragging me towards death, that is, towards the satisfaction of unlawful desires, and I realise this is partly because I have not altogether led a life as perfect as other believers. But I confess it to my Lord and I do not blush in his sight because I am not telling lies. From the time in my early manhood when I came to know him, the love of God and reverence for him have grown in me, and up to now, by the favour of God, I have kept the faith.¹⁵⁰

Yet in the following two excerpts from Patrick’s *Declaration*, we see also a resolve to remain a faithful witness:

I now entrust my soul to God, who is most faithful and for whom I am an ambassador in my humble station. For God has no favourites and he chose me for this office to become one of his ministers, even if among the least of them...my only prayer to God is that it may never happen that I should lose his people which he won for himself at the end of the earth. I ask God for perseverance, to grant that I remain a faithful witness to him for his own sake until my passing from this life.¹⁵¹

The following statement stresses, with even more urgency, his call to declare the Gospel:

“Indeed, I cannot keep silent, nor would it be proper...Our way to repay his to exalt him and confess His wonders before every nation under heaven.”¹⁵²

The final Aristotelian rhetorical category is that of pathos, the ability of the speaker to engage the feelings and emotions of the listener. Hunter concludes,

First, apostles like Patrick had to find a way of connecting his message to their deepest concerns. You cannot engage people without engaging their motivational and emotional agenda. Second, in contrast to the indifference of their capricious gods, the people discovered that their feelings mattered to the Triune God of Christianity. Third, their experience of God’s providence gave them victory over terror and other destructive

¹⁴⁹ Huizing, *Beyond Shamrocks and Snakes*, 69.

¹⁵⁰ Paor, 99.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 100-101.

emotions. Fourth, Christianity gave them outlets for expressing their constructive emotions through indigenous oratory, storytelling, poetry, music, dance, drama, etc...So the Celtic Christian movement was effective, in part, because its leaders took the pathos of the Celtic audience seriously.¹⁵³

Patrick and his followers were able to communicate the gospel without accommodating or compromising its message, yet in Patrick's mission and beyond, there was no bloodshed at all:

indeed there were no Irish martyrs for the first eleven centuries, despite the desire of many to give their lives so fully. Patrick's hagiographers may imply force, but there is little solid evidence of coercion and instead much evidence of harmonic interactivity. If the Irish saints' agenda was to convert the heathens, their approach worked beautifully – and this without bloodshed.¹⁵⁴

Patrick's message was contextual (using language, images and cultural elements the Celts could understand), yet done with such sensitivity, that its presence was viewed with hostility and greeted with gentility.

An adaptive Pastoral Theology

In addition to being able to insert the gospel into Celtic culture in a contextual way, Patrick showed a deliberate attempt to be pastorally adaptive, deciding what was theological essential, and what was not. Examining his life and ministry, we see a remarkably unified message regarding the aspects of Celtic culture that needed to change (because of the Gospel), and those that could remain.

One example was the tribal structure. Patrick did not directly attack governing structures in order to make them democratic, even though abuse, corruption and oppression within Celtic hierarchy were rampant. On the contrary, "in these local groupings heroic kingship and family-

¹⁵³ Hunter, 70.

¹⁵⁴ Swisher, 189.

ties were important features. Patrick's mission respected and operated in accordance with the existing relationships of people and communities."¹⁵⁵

Another example was Patrick's discourse with the Celts regarding nature. As an example, Patrick did not attempt to institute laws forbidding druidic priests from practicing, nor did he campaign against or demolish pagan Irish places of worship. On the contrary, we see Patrick leaving pagan worship and their sites in place, affirming the Celts' love for nature but encouraging them to direct their veneration and worship to the true God. Bausch agrees that "although some beliefs and practices had to be rejected, much was affirmable and compatible with the gospel."¹⁵⁶ Hunter confirms Patrick's approach, by alluding to the fact that Celtic Christians marked their crosses on existing pagan altars.¹⁵⁷

The same approach was taken in the area of anthropology. Whereas many Roman Christians emphasized the Augustinian teaching on original sin and the depravity of man, Patrick's theology among the Celts emphasized that human nature was "imprinted with the image of God, full of potential and opportunity, longing for completion and perfection."¹⁵⁸ Swisher concurs as he writes, "an optimistic view of humanity is one of the most profoundly successful aspects of Patrick's approach. In contrast with the Roman perspective, Patrick saw potential in everyone."¹⁵⁹ Swisher goes on to quote Thomas Cahill, who concurs that

"Augustine looked into his own heart and found there the inexpressible anguish of each individual, which enabled him to articulate a theory of sin that has no equal – the dark

¹⁵⁵ Gordon McMullan, "Saint Patrick: Insights on His Ministry and Mission in Ireland", *Simul Iustus et Peccator: Essays in Honor of Donald S. Armentrout* 23–36 (2003): 28.

¹⁵⁶ Bausch, 83.

¹⁵⁷ In *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (page 93), George Hunter points out that Patrick and his followers would etch the sign of the cross into an altar's stones, rather than tear it down.

¹⁵⁸ Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993), 59-60.

¹⁵⁹ Swisher, 193.

side of Christianity. Patrick prayed, made peace with God, and then looked not only into his own heart but the hearts of others. What he saw convinced him of the bright side – that even slave traders can turn into liberators, even murderers can act as peacemakers, even barbarians can take their places among the nobility of heaven.”¹⁶⁰

What we see is not a heretical emphasis by Patrick and his followers. but an ongoing paradox and theological tension that built upon—and leveraged rhetorically—a pre-existing Celtic optimism.

More so, if one were to conclude that an emphasis on mankind’s goodness aligns Patrick’s work with Pelagianism, one would not only be lobotomizing Patrick’s teaching (which included Augustine’s beliefs about depravity), but ignoring Augustine’s reputation within the later Reformation. For it was the Calvinists who later identified God’s involvement in creation and mankind, through what they coined “common grace”.¹⁶¹

Patrick also applied an adaptive pastoral theology in the Celtic practice of offering human sacrifices - a practice that, to many Christians, would relegate the Irish as outside the grace of God! Yet Patrick dealt with this practice (not with harsh repudiation thereof) with an emphasis upon the practice being replaced by the Gospel, declaring “that such sacrifices were no longer needed. Christ had died once for all.”¹⁶²

In this important area of adaptation, a brief summation of why Patrick was successful, is in order: First, he did not spring to cast judgment upon the act. He was not offset by their culture; he did not expect the Celts to be Christian, or to operate in a Christ-like way. He expected the

¹⁶⁰ Swisher, 193.

¹⁶¹ Common grace (in contrast to what Calvin called “saving grace”) was a term that Calvin and his followers used to refer to the grace of God that is common to every person, as well as various areas of life such as the suspension of creation, restraint of human sin and preservation of morality, the quickening of the conscience and human advancements in areas such as science, art and law, among others.

¹⁶² Cahill, 140.

Celts to think and act people without Christ. We see in him neither surprise nor offense in their most unregenerate beliefs and activities.

Second, Patrick had patience and trust in God's providential and sanctifying work. This created a natural environment where God accomplished the convicting and sanctifying work, whilst Patrick could do his - which was not to attempt to modify behaviors. Patrick did not attempt to Christianize the Celts by moralism, constant belittlement or heavy-handed attempts at behavior-modification.

Third, Patrick saw deeper still into the intention, motivation and heart behind the act. This exposed the value that is lying behind the act, and revealed what would become the main avenue for the Gospel. If the "near idol" (what could be seen, touched, experienced) was the act, then the "far idol" was the need for power, safety, love, community and so forth. It appeared that Patrick could intuitively look past the near idol, to the far idol that drove the need.

Fourth, Patrick's desire was that they would see and change their behaviors through the gospel. As such, his energies focused on their salvation, spiritual formation, and mission, rather than upon reacting or opposing human sinfulness through domination-styled initiatives. George Hunter describes Patrick's choice in this sense, as "Christianizing" (versus "civilizing");¹⁶³ in doing so, he appeals to Pierce Beaver's work in "The History of Missions Strategy":

Some held that a certain degree of civilization was first necessary to enable a people to understand and accept the faith. Others argued that one should begin with Christianization since the gospel inevitably produced a hunger for civilization. Most believed that the two mutually interacted and should be stressed...simultaneously.¹⁶⁴

Patrick would approach the area of sex and sexuality in the same way, even though Irish culture contained rampant marital infidelity, polyamorous sexuality and permissive

¹⁶³ On page 17, Hunter states, "Protest mission leaders of the last several hundred years, have usually assumed that the two goals of a Christian mission are to "evangelize" a people and to "civilize" them.

¹⁶⁴ Hunter, 16.

homosexuality to such an extent they appeared, without conscience. Cahill concurs that indeed, “Irish sexual arrangements were relatively improvisational. Trial ‘marriages’ of one year, multiple partners and homosexual relations among warriors, were all more or less the order of the day.”¹⁶⁵ There is no evidence that Patrick, in any way, agreed or blessed such improvisation. However, on such issues, Patrick is quiet. As Cahill continues,

Patrick is as silent about sex as are the Gospels...and felt little need to stress these matters...Despite Patrick’s great success in changing the warrior mores of the Irish tribes, their sexual mores altered little. Even the monasteries he established were not especially notable for their rigid devotion to the rule of chastity...None of this should be surprising if we assume that there were characteristic aspects of Irish culture that Patrick had taken to heart and on which he chose to build his new Christianity.”¹⁶⁶

We are not quite sure why Patrick chose to remain passive; indeed, many would translate such passivity as compromising the Gospel. What appears obvious, on the other hand, is that Patrick made a decision that (since such lifestyles and activities were rampant) his role was to focus on Gospel proclamation – and allow the Spirit to deal with the person once they were converted – rather than oppose behaviors that were so socially accepted that the Gospel message might have been rejected prematurely. It may have been in this sense that Patrick saw past the immoral sexual acts and lifestyles and sought to communicate how the Gospel met that fundamental need. All we have at this point is the lack of active teaching, and conjecture as to his thinking on the matter.

Fifth and finally, the results seemed to take care of themselves (see the final section of this chapter) as the Celts eventually ceased, or minimized ungodly practices as a result of Christ’s work in their hearts, not the reproach of man. This was a mark of genius in Patrick’s ministry. By doing mission in this way, Patrick preserved the people’s basic Celtic identity and

¹⁶⁵ Cahill, 135.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 135.

human dignity, while inserting the Gospel into the broken soul of their culture. Cahill would summarize Patrick's contribution by stating:

The survival of an Irish psychological identity is one of the marvels of the Irish story. Unlike the continental church fathers, the Irish never troubled themselves overmuch about eradicating pagan influences...The pagan festivals continued to be celebrated...But after Patrick the eviler gods shrank in stature and became much less troublesome, became in fact the comical gargoyles of medieval imagination, peering fearfully from undignified nooks, and the belief grew strong that the one thing the devil cannot bear is laughter.¹⁶⁷

As a final note, Celtic opposition was so slight compared to what it could have been, especially if previous Romanesque evangelistic methods had been attempted on a larger scale.

The reason for such lack of opposition was Patrick's commitment to – wherever possible – building upon (rather than tearing down) Celtic values and customs. In this regard, Hunter reports that “Celtic Christianity often retained, and ‘Christianized’ some of the prior religion’s holy days, festivals, and ceremonies, thereby ‘grafting’ the new onto the old. Christian priests and monks often wore a clothing or hairstyle reminiscent of the people’s former priests. Celtic Christianity preferred continuity rather than discontinuity, inclusion rather than exclusion.”¹⁶⁸

This was so very characteristic of Patrick's ministry, that even in the midst of Celtic opposition to the Christian message:

there was a deep sensitivity about the way in which the Celtic church went about its mission. Nowhere do we get the impression of a powerful ecclesiastical force moving in on reluctant individuals...Because they invested so much in a prayerful opening up of their intuition and imagination to the influence of the Holy Spirit, Celtic Christians were very sensitive to presences of good and evil in people and places. They therefore sensed what was good in a community and blessed it accordingly; or they sensed evil in which case they sought to combat it with prayer.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Cahill, 149.

¹⁶⁸ Hunter, 93.

¹⁶⁹ Mitton, 96.

One exception to Patrick's reticence to oppose Celtic customs, was his attempt, later in life, to eradicate slavery. This was no doubt a result of the injustices he saw forced upon them, as well as his own experience of slavery. Yet, even as preached against this practice – we hear of little to no negative impact on his ministry - nor in his reputation with the Celts. Patrick probably saw slavery as a harmful practice that he could dismantle without ruining his work or tearing asunder the fabric of Celtic life; hence, his intentional decision to attempt its overthrow.

The Development of Celtic Christian lifestyles

In addition to an adaptive pastoral theology, Patrick created a distinctively Christian culture, that retained its Irish identity. To accomplish this, he established an indigenous community with an integrated spirituality and communal devotional practices.

An Indigenous Community. One of the main reasons for the success of Patrick's mission was its indigenous nature; it was given back to the Celts, driven by the Celts, and continued with a native Celtic identity. Hunter affirms that, "the church that emerged within the tribe would have been astonishingly indigenous."¹⁷⁰ However, before delving too far into the topic, a brief description of the term "indigenous" is warranted. William Henry Scott summarizes it as,

a native church supported by the native economy in a manner to which the natives of the country are accustomed, a church in which worship is expressed with native religious insight and in the service of which the native social arts are employed...and the transformation of society generally is sought through the inner working of the Holy Spirit rather than through outward imitation of the missionary's way of life."¹⁷¹

The key here is that Patrick trusted God, and Irish converts, by giving over control of the ministry, especially as it grew and expanded beyond his control. Who else best to communicate

¹⁷⁰ Hunter, 22.

¹⁷¹ Scott, 137.

the Gospel to the Celts, but Irish converts? The opposite could have resulted (i.e. missionary isolation, fatigue and failure), if Patrick had attempted to keep Celtic Christianity appear “Western”-with Roman leadership, methods and metrics for success. As it was, Patrick initially bridged the gap between cultures, successfully planted a vision in the hearts of Christian Celts, then released the Irish into positions of leadership and ministry.

Integrated Spirituality. Second, Celtic Christians worked to integrate spirituality into their temporal lives, not segregate their spirituality from the “real world”. “Community to the Celts was not separated by supernatural/natural dichotomy, as hinted at in Augustine... To them, the communities of the heavenly and earthly realms were an ever-present reality.”¹⁷² Therefore, in their personal devotional lives, their community and cultural life, we find in Patrick’s Christianity “very few boundaries between the sacred and the secular.”¹⁷³

This was true, for example, in regards to their devotional life, and daily life. Looking back at Patrick’s early years, his prayer life began when (as a slave) he was alone tending sheep in the hillsides of Ireland. From this, as well as other early experiences, Patrick learned the importance of the Spirit’s work, that hearing from God was as important as speaking to God throughout the day; prayer was not simply an event it time, it was the daily expectation of God’s supernatural power, just as Patrick had been spoken to by God himself, through words and dreams. This led to Patrick’s subsequent emphasis both on salvation, as well as on the Holy Spirit’s work within the believer after salvation: “during his servitude, he did not merely experience God’s guidance through circumstances and events, but also by His coming to him

¹⁷² Cooper, 41.

¹⁷³ Swisher, 186.

personally in both prayer and daily life. Later, he taught God's active and personal role in becoming incarnate and working for our salvation actively from within our nature."¹⁷⁴

This is reflected in Patrick's own words:

And another night He spoke (God knows – not I – whether within me or beside me) in words which I heard in terror, but without understanding them, except that at the end of the message, He said: 'He who gave His life for you; it is He who speaks within you' and so I woke, full of joy. And again, I saw Him praying within me and I was as if I were inside my own body, and I heard Him above me – that is, over my inner person – and He was praying hard with groanings. And all the while I was dumbfounded and astonished, wondering Who it could be that was praying within me. But at the end of the prayer, He spoke, saying that He was the Spirit. And so I woke, and I recollected what the Apostle had said: 'The Spirit helps us in the deficiencies of our prayers, for we do not know what is proper to pray for, but the Spirit Himself pleads on our behalf with unutterable groanings which cannot be expressed in words.' And again: 'The Lord, our advocate, prays on our behalf.'"¹⁷⁵

Patrick's prayers were also about nature and all of life; the Celtic Christians had prayers for daily tasks and needs, mornings, evenings and seasons; for homes, work, family, animals, farms and their community. To this, Mitton adds: "Celtic Christians found it as natural to pray during the milking of the cow as they did to pray in church...there were prayers for getting up in the morning, for washing and dressing, for working, for resting, for meeting friends, for eating, for tidying the house, for undressing, for going to bed."¹⁷⁶

In addition, prayers were said (and eventually, written) about the past, present and future-including prayers to the community of saints, who reminded the Celts that they were not alone, encouraging them towards their eternal treasure in heaven. Swisher agrees when he writes that, "in Celtic spirituality, there is a sense of God and the saints as a continuing, personal, helpful

¹⁷⁴ Bausch, 80.

¹⁷⁵ Paor, 100-101.

¹⁷⁶ Mitton, 31.

presence.”¹⁷⁷ As a matter of fact, for Patrick and his followers, the doctrine of the communion of saints “eventually replaced the pre-Christian Irish practice of ancestor-worship.”¹⁷⁸

This prayer life included the importance of extended times of solitude, and the establishing of communities that were as evangelistic and mission-minded as they were also monastic and ascetic in nature. In his book, *Restoring the Woven Cord*, Michael Mitton attests that a strong connection existed between St. Patrick, the Celtic movement, and Desert Fathers such as St. Anthony. Mitton writes, “It is no surprise that a church so closely connected with the Desert Fathers should see such a flourishing of eremitical life.”¹⁷⁹

Another key component of Patrick’s integrated spirituality was the unbounded and porous nature of the Celtic community. As communities (eventually known as “monasteries”) began to be formed, they were not impermeable, entrenched enclaves, but very social communities that were also medical, educational, vocational and missionary sending centers with people entering and leaving all the time. This included people coming and receiving Christian hospitality, for which Celtic Christians were famous: “the monastic community’s highest commitment is hospitality to strangers, seekers, pilgrims and refugees.”¹⁸⁰

As we will discover later, such communities were not only places to which others were attracted, but places where the Irish were converted, formed, and released. Mitton compares Celtic monasteries to their Eastern predecessors and forms two conclusions: “the Celts were much more open to people and more evangelistic to the society in which they lived”;¹⁸¹ second:

¹⁷⁷ Swisher, 186.

¹⁷⁸ On page 198 of his article (“Celtic Culture and the Conversion of Ireland”), Scott explains this in detail.

¹⁷⁹ Mitton, 26.

¹⁸⁰ Hunter, 52.

¹⁸¹ Mitton, 37.

they were much more open to study and the intellectual pursuit of learning...the educational centers at these monasteries attracted students not only from all over Ireland, but thousands from Britain and the continent as well. In addition, the elaborate art of the ancient Celts was kept alive and perpetuated in the illumination of manuscripts and the design of metal work such as chalices and crosiers, as well as brooches and jewelry.¹⁸²

The Celtic Christian practice of hospitality would lead to an understanding that, though some of the Celts found conversion through interactions in town (preaching, drama, conversation, etc.), many others experienced salvation a different way; they needed a sense of *belonging* within the Christian community (by seeing similar values, the genuineness of people's faith, etc.), before *believing*.¹⁸³ Hunter reinforces this concept by describing the Celtic model for reaching people as, "You first establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith. Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer and worship. In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them to commit."¹⁸⁴

Celtic Christianity had a dual emphasis: that prayer was transcendent as well as immanent; that the dwelling place of God was in heaven and in the natural world; that Christian community life must be both attractive to, as well as permeate into, the culture around it; that salvation was not simply as an event but a process. It was only quite natural then, that Patrick's understanding of the nature and scope of the gospel was not simply limited to a verbal message, but included all of the facets of gospel ministry in and for the world.

¹⁸² Mitton, 37.

¹⁸³ On pages 40-41 of his book, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, John Finney affirms that unconverted Celts sensing they belong in the Christian community, then coming to believe, was one of three important aspects of Celtic Christianity. To explain this idea, he uses the biblical reference of moving "from the Damascus road to the road of Emmaus" in one's soteriology. Finney writes: "The 'new evangelism', while accepting that sudden conversions occur, also makes space for those who come to Christ over a period of time...While it is true that a sizable minority of people have a 'Pauline' conversion, the majority do not. For them the biblical paradigm is not the Damascus road but the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus."

¹⁸⁴ Hunter, 53.

We see in Patrick and his followers (and in the monastic-style communities that emerged during his time) a gospel that not only included the discipleship and care for those who were recently converted, but the feeding of the hungry, the healing of the sick, instruction in literacy and the copying of biblical texts as well as training for missionary ventures such as church planting. All this was clearly a part of Patrick's gospel.

Another important aspect of integration existed in the integration of character and behavior. Patrick's character and behavior matched his message: he wrote about his weaknesses (lack of education, failings as a bishop) and constant need for God's mercy and sustenance; he forgave the captors and oppressors of his youth, as well as those who opposed him as an adult; he wedded God's justice with mercy as he pronounced judgment upon Coroticus' behavior, with the opportunity for God's mercy upon repentance. Remarking on Patrick's character, Thomas Cahill writes:

“We can be sure that the Irish found Patrick admirable according to their own highest standards: his courage – his refusal to be afraid of them – would have impressed them immediately; and, as his mission lengthened into years and came to be seen clearly as a lifetime commitment, his steadfast loyalty and supernatural generosity must have moved them deeply.”¹⁸⁵

Communal Devotional Practices. The third means by which Patrick created Christian lifestyles that were also distinctly Irish, was through establishing communal devotional practices; these led to a monasticism that was “rivaled...only by Benedict's on the continent.”¹⁸⁶ Before pressing forward into the practices themselves, it is important to provide some background.

Immediately following Patrick's death, monasteries were one of the primary ways that Celtic Christianity preserved the Scriptures, cared for strangers, and spread throughout Ireland and beyond. In fact, little is known about the church of Ireland after Patrick, but historians are

¹⁸⁵ Cahill, 124.

¹⁸⁶ Huizing, 84.

unified that Celtic monasticism was the primary conduit for Christianity's prolific growth. Ian Bradley adds that “the dominant institution of Celtic Christianity was neither the parish church nor the cathedral, but the monastery, which often grew to become a combination of commune, retreat house, mission station, hotel, hospital, school, university, arts centre and power-house for the local community.”¹⁸⁷

What we know about spiritual formation in Patrick's day, we largely deduce from his writings about himself as well as the nature of these monasteries, immediately following his death. Such practices may partially describe monks and nuns in our day, but we must be careful not to assume the two are identical. For example, in Patrick's day it was common to have both monks and nuns living in community, with nuns involved in leadership as well as in instruction.¹⁸⁸ With this in mind, we will briefly describe the shape and behaviors of such communities.

First, Patrick's communities were mission stations for the sending of missionaries. As we will discuss later, in more detail, bishops were not primarily responsible for administration or pastoral oversight, though they were responsible for officiating the sacraments and ordinations for churches and monasteries. This meant that their focus, and likely, gifting, was apostolic and evangelistic. This leadership model greatly changed their fundamental purpose from the Roman way of doing things. It is one thing to have a deacon asking for more congregational involvement in mission; it is quite another when a bishop has the position, power and passion to make mission the community's primary imperative. This was so ingrained within their very fabric, that “Irish

¹⁸⁷ Bradley, 70.

¹⁸⁸ See Timothy Joyce on this topic on pp. 41-42 and Finney's work on “double monasteries” on pp. 59-60.

Monasteries were the spearhead of the Irish Church.”¹⁸⁹ Likewise, it was the the *Peregrinati* who “enabled the Celtic monastic movement to move fast and far”.¹⁹⁰

Second, Patrick’s communities also practiced spiritual disciplines that would be later associated with ascetic life;¹⁹¹ he was known to retreat from others and fast regularly, in order to be closer to God. His followers were encouraged to do the same. As Mitton reports, it was the “custom of Celtic bishops to go to a ‘desert’ during Lent in fasting and prayer...The ascetic life, lived out in some remote and, frankly, fairly hostile places encouraged a sense of doing battle in the wilderness...but the close proximity to the forces of nature also had the effect of quickening the spirit in prayer.”¹⁹²

Finney adds that this this included, “discipline and prayer. When they settled in an area they carried on the regime of prayer which they brought from their home monastery: the office were recited and the Scriptures were studied. If a priest was present they celebrated the Eucharist.”¹⁹³ Hunter adds that they “participated in the common life, meals, work, learning, biblical recitation, prayers and worship of the whole monastic community ...Celtic Christians often sang and prayed thirty psalms a day.”¹⁹⁴

Third, Patrick’s communities practiced that idea of each member having an *anamchara*, or “soul friend”. This is a person with whom individuals were to meet for accountability, encouragement, counsel, confession and absolution. So important was this soul friend within

¹⁸⁹ Finney, 56.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 57. The *Peregrinati* were nomadic, evangelistic Celtic monks, who travelled alone and in teams.

¹⁹¹ The word “ascetic” in this sense confers the idea of abstention from certain indulgences or privileges (food, alcohol, sex, marriage, etc.) as well as the embrace of spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, solitude).

¹⁹² Mitton, 74.

¹⁹³ Finney, 68.

¹⁹⁴ Hunter, 48-49.

Celtic spiritual formation, that there was a well-known saying at the time that “a person without a soul friend was like a body without a head. Soul friends had no status; they could be clergy or lay, and this system dispersed the authority of the community away from one particular person or hierarchical group to a network of support people.”¹⁹⁵

Release into Mission

Our final perusal of Celtic apostolic practices will look directly at the release of the Irish Christians into mission. In many respects, the entire chapter has been about mission. This section, however, will address issues directly related to missionary-sending in Patrick's day, such as the relationship between church and culture, laity, vision, redundancy and opposition.

Although Patrick was committed to the importance of indigenous and innovative apostolic work, he was also committed to continuing patterns of worship and church life that had been practiced since its foundation; inasmuch as he was inventive (when it came to mission and church structures), he was actually “traditional”, so to speak, in regards to the church's fundamental identity.

For example, once a Christian community was established, he began to organize local communities in a diocesan manner, with bishops overlooking their sees; “this was in embryo when St Patrick arrived as a missionary and was reasonably well established by the time of his death in 461.”¹⁹⁶ This was also true of the church's life together. Patrick believed in

the importance of the Church, the Body of Christ, as that unified community into which the individual believer is incorporated...The sacraments of the Church, the centerpiece of the common life of the faithful, strengthen the double intimacy of believers with God and with one another. Baptism establishes the mutual indwelling of believers and Christ, and between all baptized in Christ. In the Eucharist, these intimate connections are

¹⁹⁵ Mitton, 74.

¹⁹⁶ Finney, 54.

strengthened as the baptized receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. The rite of Ordination and the Marriage Blessing enhance these links in practical terms as the common lives of believers and families are assured of the divine Presence.¹⁹⁷

However, it was in the relationship of ecclesiology to missiology, where Patrick differed from the Roman model. Rather than copy in full the Roman way and attempt to insert it within Celtic culture, Patrick kept what he believed would work regarding Roman structure, and discarded the rest. Hunter points out that “his teaching concerning the importance of the Church centered on the sacraments, faith, scriptures and ministry, not on its supporting structures. This opened the way for subsequent generations of Irish Christians to adapt such structures to the needs of their distinctive culture.”¹⁹⁸

Rather than attempt to force culture to conform to the church's mold, Patrick shaped and adapted the church to mold the culture it was reaching; in so doing, he kept the most essential nature and identity of the church intact. Summarizing Patrick's ecclesiology, Hunter writes,

Eastern monasteries organized to protest and escape from the materialism of the Roman world and the corruption of the Church; the Celtic monasteries organized to penetrate the pagan world and to extend the Church. The eastern monks often withdrew from the world into monasteries to save and cultivate their own souls; Celtic leaders often organized monastic communities to save other people's souls. The leaders from the Eastern monasteries located their monasteries in isolated locations, off the beaten track; the Celtic Christians built their monastic communities in locations accessible to the traffic of the time, like proximity to settlements, or on hilltops, or on islands near the established see lanes.¹⁹⁹

Similar to church planting today, the newly formed Christian community would eventually build a physical structure to be used for worship services (as well as other purposes), and constitute the newly formed church with baptisms of new converts. Rather than stay to govern this parish

¹⁹⁷ Bausch, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁹⁹ Hunter, 28.

personally, Patrick would ordain a parish priest, deacon and other essential leadership, moving on to the next settlement, with others in tow. When enough churches were planted and more leadership was needed for parish priests, a bishop would be ordained in order to provide organization, accountability and support (as the Romans had done in Patrick's England).

This synthesizing of indigenously Celtic, lay-led ministry with Roman-style structure, was a strategy that Patrick and his successors utilized for decades. It included several innovative and Celtic-born features: It was led by laypeople and the drive of new converts fueled its missionary zeal; a new believer could immediately have a role in the monastic community's formation and mission, alongside the ordained clergy. It was not spectatorship, it was participatory. Also, the model was in essence quite simple, communicable, palpable and reproducible. Catechumens were trained to go and reach others in the same manner in which they had been reached;²⁰⁰ the basic model of approach, formation and release was one that could be repeated from village to village, but adapted indigenously dependent upon the specific history and needs of the settlement.²⁰¹

Response to Conflict

A final important to consider regarding any movement, especially an apostolic one, is the characteristic impact of conflict and opposition. Historians give us important information about internal and external conflict in Patrick's ministry. On one occasion, a number of Patrick's converts were enslaved by the soldiers of a British Roman (who lived either in England or

²⁰⁰ A catechumen was a recent convert who was trained in Christian doctrine and practice before baptism.

²⁰¹ On page 26 of his book (*The Celtic Way of Evangelism*), Hunter summarizes: "it was more of a movement than an institution...featuring laity in ministry more than clergy...Compared to the One Church it was more imaginative and less cerebral, closer to nature and its creatures, and emphasized the 'immanence and 'providence' of the Triune God."

Ireland). This was the situation that prompted Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus*, which was written after Patrick's first remonstrance was greeted with offense and mockery. In his *Letter*, Patrick excommunicates Coroticus and demands the captives' prompt return. Some historians contend that Patrick's harsh response prompted charges that he would later address in his *Declaration*. Regarding the *Letters*, Joyce writes, "these writings are clearly authentic, and they reveal a very appealing person, someone helpful today as a role model of response to God's love coming even in adversity."²⁰²

Patrick's *Declaration* is, in many regards, a defense of his ministry against charges of financial impropriety and illegitimacy, which had been formed against him internally-by fellow English clergy. In this document, Patrick provides a list of several gifts and payments he did not accept (gifts by wealthy women, payments for baptisms and ordinations) as well as many expenses he paid out of his own funds, including gifts to kings and judges in Ireland as well as those who travelled with him. He also defends his reasons for working to convert such a remote and marginalized people as the Celts. On a much more personal level, the *Declaration* includes Patrick's defense against an unknown sin that he committed before the age of fifteen - a sin that he shared in confidence, with someone who later used this against him.

In addition to internal conflict, Patrick also experienced a great deal of opposition externally, from the Celts themselves: he was beaten, robbed of all he had and bound in chains to await an execution that never in fact, occurred.²⁰³ In his *Declaration*, Patrick states that "many years later" (referring to his near-execution event), he was a captive for 60 days, without giving

²⁰² Joyce, 31.

²⁰³ Paor, 107.

details.²⁰⁴ We can infer from these situations that there was opposition of lesser and more frequent nature, as the Celts misunderstood, mistrusted and opposed Patrick and his followers.

Lastly, what we see in Patrick, reveals a passionate man who took action when opposed, but did so with candor, integrity and godly character. Presumably, there were mistakes along the way; thus, Cahill would describe Patrick as one who “had a temper that could flare dangerously when he perceived an injustice – not only against him but against another, especially someone defenseless.”²⁰⁵

Part Five: Conclusion

Although many writers point out that Patrick was not the first missionary in Ireland, few contest that his ministry and mission, was successful unlike any others before, or to this day:

With the Irish – even with the kings – he succeeded beyond measure. Within his lifetime or soon after his death, the Irish slave trade came to a halt, and other forms of violence, such as murder and inter-tribal warfare, decreased...He established indigenous monasteries and convents, whose inmates by their way of life reminded the Irish that the virtues of lifelong faithfulness, courage, and generosity were actually attainable by ordinary human beings and that the sword was not the only instrument for structuring a society...Patrick’s mission planted about 700 churches and ordained perhaps 1,000 priests...at least 30-40 of Ireland’s 150 tribes were evangelized within his lifetime.²⁰⁶

Commenting on the nature of Patrick’s mission, as well as its impact, David Swisher writes: “It developed a culture and a version of Christianity all its own. When the Roman Empire collapsed, the effects of Patrick’s evangelization and the success of the Irish monastic model became known, and their learned missionaries played a key role in the re-education and re-evangelization of all of Europe.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Paor, 21.

²⁰⁵ Cahill, 147.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 110.

²⁰⁷ Swisher, 182-185.

Most notably, the movement itself not only remained, but grew beyond Patrick's life. "The Irish monks left their native country to live the perfect life (an expression of Patrick's) abroad, with no intention of returning."²⁰⁸ Such a movement speaks to Patrick's desire, not to build a program upon the ego of his oratory, wisdom or leadership, but to build his movement upon the Kingdom of God:

Within a century the country was covered with communities. Some were large and close to populated areas, but others sought out islands and mountain tops... leaders of evangelistic missions in the surrounding countryside and to the local secular leadership... This change was not confined to Ireland. It also happened in Wales and it was imported into Scotland, so become the normal Celtic pattern... Monasteries became the evangelistic spearhead of the Irish church... Despite all the help which was given to the Augustinian mission from Rome and elsewhere, the homespun Celtic evangelism appears to have been far more effective.²⁰⁹

As a final note, there are three aspects of Patrick's life that deserve to be highlighted. First, the sheer volume of data we have on Patrick, and his day, as a result of the four writings that speak directly about his life. It is a rare privilege to know and glean so much from a person so early in common era history.

Second, we should inwardly digest the practicality and applicability of Patrick's version of Christianity: their creative, innovative and intuitively indigenized way of living among the Celts; their community-centric model of spiritual transformation; their flexibility within, and adaptation to, church structures (whilst maintaining essential theological and missional convictions).

Third, we would benefit from observing the similarities between the social and cultural environment in which Celtic Christianity flourished, and the environment of the today's Church in the West. These similarities include: the social and cultural chasm that exists, like the waters

²⁰⁸ Hanson, 43.

²⁰⁹ Finney, 56-57.

of the Irish Sea, between those who are “sacred” and the “secular”, the religious “right” and the “left”, the “found” and the “lost”;²¹⁰ the prejudice that remains between evangelicals, fundamentalists, conservatives and those who we label as “liberals”, the “lost”, or the “unchurched”—people whose values, convictions and habits are often unknown, misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented; finally, the scarcity of individuals who appear willing to transgress the social, cultural and spiritual impasse that we find ourselves in today.

It is, therefore, quite apt that we turn our gaze from the medieval era to a contemporary one—samples of a movement and a church—who are walking in Patrick’s footsteps.

²¹⁰ These are intentionally polarized and hyperbolic.

CHAPTER 4—RESEARCH

This chapter contains five parts: Part one is an introduction to the research, outlining what I set out to do, how I accomplished it, and details about the process (where, when, with whom, and so forth); part two introduces a contemporary apostolic movement to provide a broader perspective; parts three and four are the research proper, presenting interviews and responses from leaders, and laity in the local church; part five is a summary and analysis of the chapter material.

Part One: Introduction

What are the characteristics of movements, churches, leaders and laity—that are successfully bridging social, cultural and spiritual divides between themselves, and those they hope to reach? This question fueled my research, which was qualitative and ethnographic in nature;²¹¹ a process of asking questions, listening, learning and codifying how the unchurched are being successfully reached through the application of apostolic beliefs and practices.

To this end, I began to look for examples of both a contemporary movement, and a local church. By examining a movement, my hope was to find a relevant parallel to our discoveries in Ephesians 4, Acts 17, and the Celtic Christian movement. I hoped also to provide a larger context through which the missional practices of a local church, and its leaders, could be understood and accepted.

I began to look for a contemporary movement whose style, demographics, beliefs and ethos, would be a good match for my context at The River Anglican Church. As mentioned in

²¹¹ Qualitative research is often distinguished from quantitative research, which focuses on proving a question through the scientific method, often using statistics, metrics and the empirical process. Qualitative research is ethnographic, which involves the study of people and the exploration of cultural phenomena in its natural setting.

chapter 1, this negated several others that, after perusal, contained drastically different theological convictions, rendering them unusable for my purposes.

As I searched for a relevant movement, I came to realize that several writers (whom I'd been reading for almost a decade), were operating with very similar concerns, convictions and principles, but within differing traditions and roles; many of these writers, incidentally, pointed back to some of the same names and sources, for their own inspiration. When looking back at these sources, I discovered a global "tribe" (separated by age, geography and tradition), whose fundamental ideas about the church and mission, matched my own. Only as of late, this global community has worked towards a greater sense of understanding and self-definition, calling themselves the "Missional Church Movement" (hereafter, abbreviated as "M.C.M.", or simply, referred to as the "Movement").²¹² Within the last decade, countless books and articles have been written to describe, and critique the Movement.

The reason the Movement has been of such assistance, is because its journey is concurrent with my own (one of self-understanding and self-identification, related specifically to mission and culture). It has helped me to find words for what I was previously unable to articulate, shaping the person I am. Said otherwise, the Movement's work to regather what is critical to their identity and mission, and convey their findings as a vision for the future, has been collateral to my own. Therefore the research has been of great benefit to me.

Part Two: The Missional Church Movement

The Movement is a largely-informal collaboration of theologians, pastors, thinkers and writers who have converged around similar values, beliefs and practices, primarily within the last two

²¹² By way of explanation, movements, like individuals, must mature by realizing who they are, and who they are not. If leaders were not to step forward and assist with the defining process, the Movement's identity would have become too disparate-losing their core convictions-or become so narrow they become irrelevant and exclusive.

decades.²¹³ As a movement, its origins (dates, names, places, etc.) are difficult to identify; however, several who have sought to define it, point to the following:²¹⁴ Karl Barth’s writings, including his ideas regarding proper biblical theology as missional theology, and his work on Trinitarian missiology; Lesslie Newbigin’s works, including among other things, his development of contextual ministry, and philosophy of cultural engagement; Darrell Guder, who (as part of a team called the “Gospel and Culture Network”), wrote *Missional Church*, further articulating a missional ecclesiology; and David Bosch’s book, *Transforming Mission* which “combined biblical-theological methodology with historical theology.”²¹⁵

Although there are many others who have been, and continue to be, essential communicators and guides within the Movement (including Craig Van Gelder, Alan Roxburgh, Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, Eddie Gibbs, Reggie McNeal, Ed Stetzer, George Hunsberger, Lois Barrett, and Mike Breen), these individuals have been critical to its early formation.

Unlike recent movements within Christendom (namely the church growth movement and seeker movement in the late 20th century), the M.C.M. has been truly “organic” from its inception:²¹⁶ It has no headquarters, offices, or paid staff; there are no executive officers demanding that goals, and imperatives be completed by specified deadlines; and very few, if any, will gain financially from its success or failure. In this way, it is not an *organization*, so much as an *organism*, that is changing, growing and spreading—essentially, by itself (without pressure

²¹³ This convergence has occurred in ways largely spontaneous, informal and impromptu; however there have been more structured collaborative projects such as conferences, co-authorships and consortiums. It is most present and active today in the U.S., U.K. and Europe.

²¹⁴ In addition several articles (quoted in this chapter), two books have been published providing its history and an attempt to define it. They are *The Missional Church in Perspective* by Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile and *Introducing the Missional Church* by Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scot Doren.

²¹⁵ Rodman MacIlvaine, “What Is the Missional Church Movement?”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 665 (January 2010): 101.

²¹⁶ I’m using the word, “organic” to imply that the Movement has not been disturbed by outside influences, affecting its natural and healthy growth.

being applied from outside or above).²¹⁷ It is a social, cultural and spiritual phenomenon, emerging from the “bottom-up” and not from the “top-down”.²¹⁸

Although the Movement has definable characteristics that distinguish it from other movements, it should not (and foreseeably, cannot) be contained, in order to be packaged or sold.²¹⁹ This is because (although the following characteristics can be codified, embraced, and eventually practiced), their application must be uniquely adapted, by the people who wield them, to their unique context.²²⁰

There’s a strong sense within those in the Movement (like other previously important-and-positive historical movements), that its beginnings were not in man, but in God. From that Divine conception, various individuals (from different parts of the world) have formed cooperatives that flow like streams, out of the Movement’s unified missional river.²²¹ At the center of that river, we can see the following apostolic characteristics:

- It is, first and foremost, the *missio Dei* (God’s mission).²²² Not only is He the originator, but He is the One who goes before us through the Spirit, preparing hearts and sending us in the world.

²¹⁷ Whereas an organization often needs to market and sell a product to support its existence, an organism contains life and vitality within itself and is not reliant upon mercantile efforts, for its growth.

²¹⁸ See also McIlvaine’s summary of the “self-identity of missional Christians” (pages 104-106).

²¹⁹ Many equate the M.C.M. with the “Emergent Movement”, which it is not. Many of the E.M.’s founders are entirely different people, with extremely different views (early in its formation, the E.M. included Brian McLaren, Rob Bell and Mark Driscoll, and so forth). This confusion is made, for example, in Elanora L. Scott’s article: “A Theological Critique of the Emerging, Postmodern Missional Church/Movement”.

²²⁰ A strong difference between modernity and post-modernity is the tendency within the former to see “progress” as the successful mass production of an item or idea. This flies in the face of post-modernity, which looks more towards a creative and native process of discovery-whether it be craft beer, coffee, or religious thought.

²²¹ In Rick Richardson’s article, “Emerging Missional Movements”, he identifies five streams that flow out of what he calls “Emerging Missional Movements”: the Missional Stream (the M.C.M.), the Emerging Stream, the Multiethnic Stream, the Neo-Monastic Stream, and the Multiplying Stream. In addition to these streams, many cooperatives have formed, which include the God and Culture Network, The Verge, Forge Network, 3DM, The Missional Network, and Allelon; other web-based cooperatives exist as well.

²²² A long line of thinkers have contributed to this theological idea. More recently, John Stott as well as his protégé, Christopher Wright, have written on it extensively.

- The Movement is a change of mindset from churches *doing* missions, to the church being *on* mission, both in the U.S., as well as overseas.²²³
- The church must be incarnational as well as attractional. In today's post-Christian culture, the latter is not an effective strategy for reaching those who don't know Christ.²²⁴
- The Movement's focus is on building the Kingdom of God (or the "Reign of God"), which includes the church, but is not limited to it.²²⁵ God is in the church, and the world (via culture). There is a bias in the Movement away from institutional ways of operating.²²⁶
- The church is meant to be a porous, center-set organism, not a bounded set organization with people who are "insiders" and "outsiders".²²⁷ We must allow people to belong before believe.
- The Movement seeks to establish Jesus at the center, as the "well", drawing others to him.²²⁸ Our lives and ways are first, shaped by Christ; then our mission and the Church, are as well.²²⁹
- As a modern-day Renaissance, Christians have the opportunity to integrate within culture, participating and collaborating especially in the arts, but also in media, education, science and civic life;²³⁰ personal passions are avenues to partner with those around us, in a new way.²³¹

²²³ In their book, *Breaking the Missional Code*, Stetzer and Putnam describe this movement as: "going from programs to processes, from demographics to discernment, from models to missions, from attractional to incarnational, from uniformity to diversity, from professional to passionate, from seating to sending, from decisions to disciples, from additional to exponential and from monuments to movements." (p. 101).

²²⁴ In his article entitled, "A Missional Ecclesiology for the 21st Century", Glen Marshall speaks about this disillusionment: "either we bury our heads in the sand and act as if things are in fact as they always were, imagining that if only we can sing loudly enough and pull the ecclesiastical duvet up high enough, we can stay secure, happy, cosy, all the while choosing to ignore the fact that this is a cosiness unto death." (p. 12)

²²⁵ See Glen Marshall's discussion of this theological idea within the Movement (pp. 15-17).

²²⁶ Rick Richardson summarizes well this institutional mindset when he writes: "missional churches move toward challenging the secular, individualistic, consumer-oriented, therapeutic-style, business-imitating, market-driven, building dominated church of the West...the attractional church of the West tends to think of people as consumers, reinforcing the pervasive practice of church shopping and turning pastors into commodities paid to provide the religious goods, services, and experiences that congregants can consume." (p. 131) See also David Bosch in *Transforming Mission* (p. 53), as well as Hammond and Cronshaw's book, *Sentness*, and going from "selling to sending." (p. 12)

²²⁷ See Frost and Hirsch's book, *Shaping of Things to Come* (pp. 47-51), for further information on the importance of missional inclusion.

²²⁸ In John 4:13-14, we see Jesus using the well as a metaphor for coming to drink from him.

²²⁹ In *Shaping of Things to Come*, Frost and Hirsch write, "Christology informs our missiology, which in turn determines our ecclesiology." (209).

²³⁰ See Scott's article, in which she identifies three Movement characteristics: identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and commitment to community. (p. 336)

- The gospel, evidenced in the person and work of Jesus, is a holistic message of good news for the whole of individuals (food, education, finances, spirituality) as well as the whole of society (the marginalized, oppressed, underemployed, etc.); being both temporal and “spiritual.”²³²
- The Movement is lay-led, with staff and clergy equipping followers of Christ for ministry in the church and world (Eph. 4:11-12). The church must reinvigorate the five-fold gifts (A.P.E.P.T.), which in the West have been reduced to a pastor-teacher model, in lieu of the first three.²³³
- Ministry needs to be integrated, contextualized and adapted into culture.²³⁴ Discourse must be in the vernacular, straying from dichotomous language;²³⁵ a mission that builds upon natural revelation, without relying on people’s understanding of (or agreement with) a Judeo-Christian worldview.²³⁶

²³¹ In his article on “The Missional Church Movement”, Tim Keller calls this, “entering and retelling culture’s stories with the gospel”, stating that we are to “theologically train lay people for public life and vocation.” (p. 2) See also Hammond and Cronshaw’s work on “shalom spirituality” (p. 87) and “safe places” (pp. 110, 123). I appreciate Marshall’s word here: “We need a gospel with ethical content restored. We need a gospel with political vision restored. We need a gospel that is good news for the world and not an offer to escape the world.” (p. 16)

²³² Tim Keller articulates this well, by stating that: “a church must be more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches and more deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches.” (p. 3)

²³³ In John E. Johnson’s article, “Is Apostolic Leadership the Key to the Missional Church?” he refers to Frost and Hirsch when he states: “they see a current system weighted in favor of teaching and pastoral care, directly marginalizing the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries” (p. 2) This is also dealt with in books such as *Creating a Missional Culture* (JR Woodward) and *Forgotten Ways* (Alan Hirsch).

²³⁴ Marshall writes: “The gospel is always communicated within a given culture but at the same time it always points beyond that culture to...God’s reign. Each church’s vocation is to be culturally bilingual.” (p. 19) In the same light, The Movement stresses the important of assimilating (to become one with) into culture, which Paul addresses in 1 Cor 9:22: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” Negative ways to relate to culture would include accommodation, domination and separation.

²³⁵ In his article, “The Missional Church”, Tim Keller explains in greater detail. In agreement, Rick Richardson writes, “We need to get beyond the evangelism/social action (and word/deed) dichotomy, rooted as it is in Enlightenment polarities such as spiritual/material, sacred/secular, and private/public and to embrace an integrated holism in which the church lives its faith and shares its life instead of treating these two as though they were separate.” (p. 134)

²³⁶ A basic understanding of natural revelation, common grace and a reinvigorated “Christian Humanism” are all important concepts for reaching people outside the church. We must build upon their world view, without attempting of first order, for them to embrace or understand our own. In his article, “What is the Missional Church Movement”, McIlvaine writes that “the church has witnessed the emergence of energetic and informed lay leaders seeking to be conduits of God’s common grace, so that they can then be conduits of God’s saving grace.” (p. 90) Rick Richardson adds: “we need to embrace a nuanced and integrated vision of the ways Christianity and cultures interpenetrate... We need to get beyond the conservative/liberal split regarding epistemology that pervaded the church in the West...the contrast between the cognitive propositional approach of the conservatives and the experiential expressivist approach of the liberals...we need not only to recognize with humility the particularity of the cultural linguistic worlds in which we live and interpret and understand truth, but also to embrace a confidence in the canon of Scripture that can guide our interaction with our tradition and shape our communication of truth so that our word is not just true for us alone, but is truly a word for the world.” (p. 135)

- The Movement seeks a renewed unity between Christians and culture, churches, denominations and our relationships with those who differ on any issue, including other religions.²³⁷

Part Three: A Local Church Interviews With Leaders²³⁸

The second stage of my research moved from the universal (a global movement), to the particular (a local church). For this stage, I needed an apostolically-inclined church to visit, deciding that it would be best to look at a local church with a similar size (to my own), in a different area than Blacksburg.

I began to inquire with colleagues who were involved on a national level, initially receiving several names of “growing churches”; I looked at their websites, writings and sermons, eventually calling several pastors, inquiring about their beliefs and practices. I discovered that although many of these leaders were reaching people outside their own churches, a majority of their newcomers were already looking for a church; their recent attendees were not ones who required church-goers sent *out*-through creative, incarnational practices; their presence was, in large-part, the bi-product of successful advertising, a good reputation, and roadside visibility. For this reason, I began to stray away from churches that were more high-profile, and seek out an elusive, grass-roots, below-the-radar community; I wanted a church that would relate to my Anglican heritage and one whose leaders would host my research.

²³⁷ In his article, “A New Apostolic Movement”, Gregory Metzger refers to John H. Armstrong’s use of the term, “missional-ecumenicism”, reflecting a renewed desire within the Movement, to work towards unity. McIlvaine also talks about the value of unity, stating: “Missional Christians generally display common ground with the world, first through generous acts of service but also through the arts and at times through positions of leadership within the community or the state.” (p. 91) Tim Keller’s article takes it yet another direction-towards other religions: “Christians will have to use the gospel to demonstrate true, biblical love and ‘tolerance’ in the ‘public square’ toward those with whom we differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which opposing views show toward Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main ‘defeater’ of the gospel in the non-Christian West.” (p. 2)

²³⁸ Two important notes: I have protected the name of the local church for the sake of anonymity. Second, parts three and four contain summaries of interviews, not the verbatim interviews themselves (which were completed using digital recording).

In order to immerse myself in the experience of this church (including its location within the City, its main facility, as well as time with their clergy, staff and laity), I spent five days on-site in July of 2013.²³⁹ During that visit, I spent several hours each day in their main facility, I attended two worship services (one in the main facility, and the other in a nearby church plant), and conducted interviews.

The three leaders I interviewed varied in age, the length of time they've been a part of the church, and the amount of time they've been in ministry (one had been in ministry for over ten years, the two others who were both in their 20's, had been in ministry less than five years each). All had come from other parts of the U.S., with a specific sense of being calling to this specific church. In this section, I will state the questions that were asked of leaders, the reason *why* I asked them (and what I was hoping to learn), and their responses.

Question One: what thinkers and ideas have influenced you? I was curious from whom they were drawing their influence (including ideas, books, leaders, movements, and so forth). I also wanted to learn more about the sources that have shaped their ideas and practices.

The first leader mentioned the following thinkers and ideas: Gabe Lions (author of *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters*) for developing an understanding of unchurched culture; George Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, for Hunter's missional analysis of Celtic Christianity; all of N.T. Wright's writings, but most specifically, his work on women and their roles in ministry; J.I. Packer's course on Anglicanism and Robert Webber's book, *Ancient/Future Worship*, for their helpful in his

²³⁹ The main facility is by day, a coffeehouse, and at night a cultural center for their local community; as such it hosts live music (serving craft beer), art shows, hosts community events, etc. The staff of the main facility are all a part of the church, working "underground" so to speak, as missionaries in their community. The church rents space from this main facility (which is technically, a for-profit entity) on Sunday mornings.

understanding of Anglicanism, and the importance of ancient worship; Mary Douglas' work on "grid and grip", a cultural model for understanding how rituals and practices are relevant to modern society; Kierkegaard's work on beauty for beauty's sake. He added that their community's goal is to be collaborative with their community in each of those "seven pillars of culture", without citing a specific reference.²⁴⁰

The second leader said that several ideas were influential to his thinking. The church takes excellence in all things very seriously (like culture does), including coffee. Before he was hired, leadership were looking for someone who was passionate about coffee, and also a person with Christian faith, (but not vice versa). He felt most Christians would not understand how they looks at this emphasis, speaking of the relationship between coffee, excellence and faith; because he loves coffee so much, excellence in the product itself is a large part of his experience of God. Other ideas that have been critical for his thinking, include entrepreneurship; he and his staff team have a lot of room to be creative risk-takers, trying new things that at times, fail. Resources that have been helpful for him include George Hunter's, *Celtic Way of Evangelism*, *Transforming Mission* by David Bosch, and *Missional Church*, edited by Darrell Guder.

The third leader said that movies such as *Chocolat* were very important for his understanding of how goodness, truth and beauty can move in a community with grace, in comparison to religious movements that move without God's characteristics. *Babette's Feast* was another movie that expressed the power of giving (the generous feast), as well as the power of hospitality and beauty (the feast and food, thereof). A powerful idea for this leader, has been that of being God's image-bearers, passed down through the theologian, Richard Pratt. In Pratt's work, he proposes commonalities that exist between those who are believers, and unbelievers,

²⁴⁰ In his book, *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture*, Marshall W. Fishwick proposes that most cultures have seven pillars: arts and entertainment, government, media, business, education, the family and religion. In missiology, the seven become an important medium in which to think about Christian cooperation.

through general revelation.²⁴¹ Leader three referred also to Thomas Howard's work, *Christianity as the New Humanism*, and Philip Lee's work, *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, as influential. An important work, through which he gained a view of the relationship between church and culture, was Richard Niebuhr's book, *Christ and Culture*. As a result, he sees our charge as missional people to operate in the world more like the Salvation Army (assisting in people's temporal and spiritual needs), than Billy Graham.

All three leaders express a great diversity in their sources (especially when reading the entirety of their responses below), however, there is a fundamental unity in their core thinking. It is also interesting to note that, as senior staff, each of these individuals alludes to different types of influence from which they draw their inspiration, the first more heavily theological and text-based, the second highly pragmatic and practical (the ministry of their main facility), and the third, strongly influenced by movies and media. There appears to be a healthy complementarity on the team.

Question Two: what have you communicated and practiced, with apostolic success? I was curious what they've taught, and done, that they've found effective in reaching people outside of their present community; I wanted to learn not only the answers themselves (the teachings and practices), but how they were thinking and talking about apostolicity.

The first leader said that there have been several effective apostolic practices of their church. First, they preached through the Gospels for the entirety of their life together (over three

²⁴¹ In his article on the apologetics of Van Til, Richard Pratt wrote: "Believers may approach unbelievers with confidence because all people remain the image of God and know deep within that Christian assertions about God and the world are true. For Van Til, the God-consciousness within each person is the *point of contact* between Christians and non-Christians. We can have meaningful dialogue with them because they are images of God and have knowledge of God and their status before him. This understanding was so vital to Van Til's thought that he described apologetic arguments as restatements and explanations of general revelation in a persuasive manner. We enter apologetic situations with sinners who are dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), but these sinners are still image bearers."

years at that point). Except for brief seasons (Advent and Lent), they have focused exclusively on the life and ministry of Jesus, especially on the social justice aspects of His work.

Furthermore, rarely do they preach on “hot button issues” like sexuality, abortion or politics. By way of contrast, they *have* verbalized open support of women in leadership, having intentionally hired a woman on staff who preaches regularly. In this regard, he mentioned that most in the church would be in line with an egalitarian view.

Third, the Local Church does not draw any lines on the issue of homosexuality, even in leadership or membership; it is simply not an issue that is talked about. At least half of the congregation would not believe homosexuality to be wrong. The leader has many openly gay people, and gay couples, attending services. Most of his people have no idea where leadership stand on the issue. However, if an individual pressed them to articulate a position on homosexuality, he would eventually communicate that (because they need such clarity), they were probably not a good fit for their church.

Fourth, leader one stated that their main facility has been a major way that people have been able to mix and mingle naturally with those in the community, and has attracted many to come and visit their worship services. Fifth, they’ve taught that in all spheres of life, what they call, “pillars of culture”, there is to be goodness (virtue), truth (logos), and beauty (aesthetic); God reveals himself through these avenues, so everything they do, and everywhere they operate, these values are essential.

As an example, church leaders made the decision to spend a large portion of money for an aesthetically beautiful space (the main facility), a full-time graphic designer, and paid musicians. Their rationale was that in order to reach the arts community, beauty (in their space, music and artwork), was a critical value. Another example is their common use of the

expression, “beauty for beauty’s sake”, which means (among other things), that beauty doesn’t need to be explained. In this sense, a musical solo does not need words, nor does art need to always be explained; it is not always about evoking a response in man, but a response from God. It can be beautiful for the sake of being beautiful. Conversely, they acknowledged that Christian art and music, can be done very poorly, with artistic excellence coming from people who are not followers of Christ. Thus, it is not only about truth and goodness, but about beauty.

A sixth important belief and practice has been creating and reforming culture, as a way of collaborating (and building bridges) with those outside of the church. He appealed to St. Patrick, who lived with the people he was called to reach, celebrating that which God gave for their mutual pleasure (poetry, song, drama, etc.); he also alluded to the Renaissance, when Christians painted, composed and built buildings with excellence, displaying the glory and beauty of God, and attracting others to Christianity through their gifts.

In tension with this is the fact that there are things culture does which are wrong; however, there are creative ways of opposing these wrongs, that actually involves doing the opposite (what is right) in a better way. For instance, abortion clinics were run out of their state not by opposition, but by the establishment of excellent pregnancy resource centers.

A seventh belief and practice has been allowing people to belong in community, before they choose to believe. Their church rarely does altar calls, but allows people to process salvation and their spiritual journey with them, rather than requiring it before they can be a part of them.

Eighth, they have chosen to use the image of stewardship to explain what other churches define as membership. For them, stewardship does not include some of the more typical requirements (including affirmation of a position on sexuality), but is a more positive word that

conveys ownership instead of exclusiveness, like the term “membership” is often used to refer to a country club or a political affiliation.

Ninth, they regularly communicate that their clergy and staff are not the “professionals”, but the support team for the laity, who are called to be “professionals” at using their careers, businesses, art and presence in the social sector, as a path for their witness.

The second leader responded that the main facility’s goal, was to create a place of (good) coffee, culture and community. As affirmation of this, an article written in their local paper, spoke of an “intangible presence” this facility has created in their community. In the same vein, leader two was told by a patron, “I love [this place], because if a business appointment doesn’t show up, there’s always someone else with whom to meet.”²⁴² Leader two added that many churches are uninvolved in the community, but if this main facility left the area, there would be a huge hole in the community. He also referred to St. Patrick, whose goal was to become “a part of the rhythms of their community”. In that same way, people in their church desire to be part of the rhythms of their city, seeing those in their city also become a part of the rhythms of the Christian community.

The third leader mentioned that a large part of their church’s success reaching others has been the establishing of “third places”²⁴³; where people go to spend their free time. Their choice to do so is because of what it offers, which is often related to culture, hospitality and beauty. Their church has worked to create third places in more large and formal ways (i.e. the main facility), and through informal “neighborhood porch parties” on Friday nights.

²⁴² I have omitted the name of the facility in this sentence, and substituted a different phrase for anonymity.

²⁴³ The idea of “third place” has been adapted from the sociological concept of third space—the social surrounding separate from the two typical environments of home (first place), and work (second space).

Another influential practice has been the decision of leadership to focus almost exclusively on the Gospels on Sundays, versus the Epistles. The context of Jesus' ministry was similar to postmodernity today, where the emphasis was on restoring the brokenness of individuals and society, as well as reacting to false and harmful forms of religion and institutionalism (for example, the Pharisees); comparatively, Paul's focus was more upon correcting what was false, and the establishment of doctrine. Because the Gospel stories about Jesus are more narrative, Paul's writings come across as more binary, fundamental, Western and modern. Leader three sees this Pauline emphasis as more critical within modernity, than post-modernity, with the pressing need being that younger generations enter into the redemptive stories of Jesus.

All who were interviewed could readily answer the question, which frankly, was fascinating (having worked in the church over a decade, I see a big difference between their responses and other leaders' abilities to answer similar questions). The immediacy, diversity and sheer number of responses, infers that so much of their life and ministry was lived *in* mission and *among* the unchurched, their answers were a part of their way of life and not something secondary. Another observation is that answers were often highly philosophical, which fits the "thinking behind the thinking" that seems to be a prerequisite for indigenous, creative and effective contextual ministry. Case in point, though ideas behind many of their answers can be found in other Movement books, some are clearly unique to their personalities, convictions and context (for example, their practice regarding the sexuality issue, as well as the choice to avoid the Epistles on Sunday mornings).

Question Three: What symbols that have been important for the Local Church, and why? I

was curious what symbols were meaningful, what the symbols signified, and a general idea of the types of symbols apostolic communities find relevant and influential.

The first leader said that main facility provided a space to create culture with those outside the Local Church, in various areas (celebrating good coffee, hosting art and music shows, parent teacher association gatherings, city meetings and political gatherings), which they would not otherwise be involved. The main facility was used so frequently by those outside the church, and so much happens there that is not related to Christianity, the perception is that the church rents space for worship on Sunday mornings, with little to no other involvement.

Another important symbol is weekly Communion and the practice of an open Eucharist (at the Local Church, there is no fencing of the Table), which is considered a weekly altar call, reminding people that Jesus welcomes everyone.²⁴⁴ The message of leadership is consistently one that Communion is a place for the marginalized, oppressed and “other-thans”; a place where they are welcome to come and receive Christ for the first, or fiftieth, time. This includes those of whatever race, class, social, economic and sexual orientation (“whatever sex they find attractive”). When asked about the power of Communion being in the person or the element, leader one responded that Communion is a mystery; it is “where their heart is”, thus the power is not in the server or in the elements, but “in the whole experience”. When people receive the Communion element, church attendees believe that they are receiving Christ; this is his main rationale for an open table. For support of this view, leader one referred to John Stott, whom he

²⁴⁴ A term used for the guarding or warning that often accompanies an invitation to the Eucharist. For example, in the earlier editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the following is said: You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, are in love and charity with your neighbour, intending to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort.” This is an example of putting a doctrinal “fence” around the Table.

attested, holds the same view (including the belief that baptism should not be a requirement for anyone to celebrate the Eucharist).

The second leader said that coffee is very much a symbol of God's delight in the creative process, and in created things; it is a way to witness. By way of confirmation, they had a customer tell them that "if their church, is half as good as their coffee, he ought to try it out". In addition to coffee, the main facility is also a symbol for the community around them; yet not simply the facility itself, but the programming decisions they make are a symbol of their missional commitment. There are many times that they offer the space for tech startups, entrepreneurship gatherings, non-profit events and "theology on tap" sessions, in lieu of other more-profitable events. A recent example of this was a memorial benefit they put together to help a family with expenses related to the tragic loss of their son.

The third leader said that the symbol of unity within diversity was a powerful message to their church and the community around them. This diversity includes a confluence of the study of God, with a passion for social justice, in the midst of the creation and celebration of culture, the rediscovery and re-formation of excellence and virtue within the arts and a Christ-centered community.

The first two responses had in common the main facility, which incidentally, was a common answer to most laity as well. Leader three noted the symbol of Christian unity and diversity, which was a distinctive and thoughtful response, especially in light of their context in a very diverse, multi-cultural city. What we're beginning to see is "value-alignment"; whereas the answers are different, what they value are similar, pointing them all in the same direction.

Question Four: What were good and bad decisions (and moments) as a community? I was curious what decisions they would reflect upon as worthwhile, and others as unprofitable, and why. I wanted also to learn what types of challenges are endemic to apostolic ministry, how they've dealt with them, and what they've learned from them.

The first leader said that preaching on Luke has been a big part of their formation as a community, with Luke's Gospel addressing social concerns, the role of women, and many other issues the unchurched have had with Christianity (including the church's tendency to be out of touch with reality, and irrelevant to culture); it has helped church attendees to see how practical Jesus is in his spirituality.

Other positive decisions include the choice to do good deeds for people, who cannot repay them. Examples include when the Local Church gathered thousands of dollars for immediate help in a neighborhood high-rise tragedy, financial support for a local urban youth initiative (for which they never expect to see a return in their own church) and partnering with other local ministries that are already active in their area; they call this "the Gospel eco-system".

Difficult moments include their decision to serve alcohol at their main facility, and constant acts of faith regarding their finances. With a total budget of over \$600,000 in 2013, they were \$150,000 under-budget by that summer.

The second leader also mentioned that the decision to serve alcohol was a tough spot for them, because it came into question on several levels (including legalities). However, they decided to do so because if they wanted to be taken seriously and to have an impact on the music culture in the city, they "needed to provide the night-time 3rd place beverage, which is craft beer". He added that many people's attitudes have changed for the better towards beer; it is no longer about the quantity or speed of consuming alcohol, but paying more for a quality product.

Furthermore, their setup is also a bit different, as a “listening room” where people are there to listen, and not specifically to drink (especially because of the price of high quality beer). Other types of establishments are not necessarily about music; in these places, often people come to drink and talk, and the band is merely background music.

The third leader mentioned that informal “third place events”, were an especially good decision. These types of “home-spun” gatherings (such as the Friday night porch parties) were where he believed, the most important ministry happened. He also saw the church’s commitment to hospitality (whether in homes or in the main facility), as a very worthwhile investment.

There appear to be an abundance and variety to their answers about good decisions, and fewer testimonies of bad decisions; that can be both good and bad, in itself. Perhaps as such a young age (like a marriage), there has not been enough time to make many mistakes, perhaps few have been made, or there is a reticence to talk about important matters that are conflictual, because of an imbalance in their emphasis on peace and harmony.

Question Five: What are future opportunities and threats? I was curious if leaders were optimistic or pessimistic about the future, and why. I was interested, furthermore, what they desired to become, and what they desired to accomplish; what concerns and fears they had about the future, and what threatened the existence or effectiveness of their ministry. I wanted to learn more about their vision, what should be duplicated (or not) in my context, and what pitfalls apostolic ministry can avoid.

The first leader said that opportunities including planting more chapels (they just planted their first in January of 2013) and being a church planting resource.²⁴⁵ Another opportunity is

²⁴⁵ They have committed to their denomination (for the exchange of monetary help), to be a training center for church planting, which involves recruiting, developing and releasing leaders for future church plants.

moving to a new facility, and tripling in size. This new facility would include present offerings (coffee, music, art, worship, etc.), but with a larger space, a co-working space for entrepreneurs, a rehearsal room and recording studio. The new facility would also be purposefully planted in a poor neighborhood, in order to encourage gentrification of that area.

However, this opportunity was also labeled as a threat because they seem to operate in a continual state of fiscal liability. They have over 30 staff, and all except two, raise their own support. Leader one was not sure if the economic model they've set up, actually works for the long term. Some in the congregation have said that they should stabilize, but his vision is to keep moving ahead.

The second leader mentioned that money has been an issue and a threat. It took several years for the main facility to break-even financially, yet this milestone did not include paying rent. As mentioned prior, this is because of the constant challenge to book events that are missional, compared to profitable.

The third leader said that a threat for the church has been the newness of the relationships, and that people who show up in a church like theirs, may often be rebounding from a negative experience with another church or organization. Because of this, newcomers may be simply "dating" the church, yet not really aware of the community's true strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the relationship may be somewhat contrived, and the level of commitment, low.

Opportunities were sparse in number, comparable to the number of threats. This may be a result of the fact that "the squeaky wheel gets the grease"; when put together in a sentence, it is often the more provocative and difficult question that grabs attention. However, it may be that what is surfacing is fear and concern for the future, impacting the ability for them to be excited

about future opportunities. The language infers that their church is a beautiful house, but some are concerned that it was built over a sinkhole, and they're not sure if and when it will collapse. In this light, only the first leader (whose role is more directly related to macro-vision) referred with excitement, to the future. The other leaders were largely dismissive of the first part of the question (related to opportunities), and more focused on responding about threats.

Part Four: The Local Church Interviews With Laity

My goal was to interview a diverse group of laity. One layperson was very new to the Christian faith, to their church, and regular attendance to any community of faith (as an adult). Another was chronologically young (early 20's), newly committed to the Christian faith, and extremely well-versed biblically (the grandson of a Baptist minister and life-long church-goer). Three others were of various chronological ages, had attended the church for over two years, were more mature in their faith (having been Christians for much longer), and with very different backgrounds and perspectives on their church, as well as Christianity in general.

Question One: Will you please tell me a bit about your background (personal, spiritual, etc.), and how you initially connected with the church? I wanted to begin with a general question to get to know them, and not simply jump into heavier questions about church, ministry and mission. I was also curious where they were before the church (spiritually, geographically, ecclesiastically, unchurched, de-churched, etc.) and how they came into it; I wanted to learn how this church was reaching people.

Layperson one grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, and didn't have a relationship with Jesus until as an adult. He moved to the city in 2008, and was introduced to the church

through their main facility; he frequently came to work there, without knowing initially it was connected to a church, to drink their (great) coffee. He visited the church's worship service because of its connection to the facility, and has been a part of the church, ever since. He eventually moved over to the church plant's worship service, so he could walk to worship.

Layperson two moved to the city with his parents. He has a background in design and helped an openly gay friend win a seat on the City Council, not a small feat in the political climate of the conservative city. His grandfather was a well-known Southern Baptist preacher that same city. After a period of agnosticism (and bad experiences with his parents' churches), he had a jaded view of church and Christianity. His spiritual journey strengthened when a friend who was attending seminary, challenged his beliefs.

He came into the church, through the main facility (as with the first layperson). It was close to work, had great coffee and he eventually struck up a friendship with one of the baristas. After time, he met one of the clergy, who was very approachable and relaxed about differences that this layperson intentionally brought up to "test" him. He eventually tried one of the Sunday evening services. During that time he'd been reading books on Christian spirituality, but had not felt there was a church where he (and his beliefs), could connect with a Jesus-believing church community. At the church, he saw a group of people that were far more interested in worship and community; when he attended, he already knew many of the people as a result of the friendships at the coffee-shop, and felt like he was already in community; the coffee-shop community was simply transposed into a Christian community at the Local Church.

His experience of the service, with its old liturgies, was one that he recognized academically, but had never seen, experientially. He described it as "beautiful"; a service that

was mindful of the past, while still aware of the present. He also commented how liturgy put the focus away from rock star personalities and on to something much different.

Layperson three said that, after a lot of church shopping, he'd been at the church for three years. He and his wife found the church because they met one of the baristas, who invited them to the service that evening. Layperson three had negative experiences with churches in his teens, including media's portrayal of how churches and leaders beat up on people, spending their energies working against culture, rather than for it.

Layperson four grew up Roman Catholic, coming to the city to study music at the School of the Arts. He met one of the staff musicians at the church, out in the community. He eventually attended a worship service, and began to attend the church regularly, because he saw them doing music and Christian worship with excellence; he believed he could learn a lot from them. Since that time, he has begun to be paid by the church to play guitar for one of the worship services.

Layperson five had a church background, and came to the city looking for a good church for his family; he found the church in 2012 through the internet and, after visiting, decided to get involved (even though the church was not strong in children's ministry). Even with young children and a less than optimal neighborhood, his family decided to move where the church was located, so they could support the ministry and community as a family, and with a home. Since that time, he's been on the church's leadership team; his background in finances and business has been helpful in practical church decisions.

All of the laity had previous church experiences, some mainly in their childhood, and only recently as adults; some of these early experiences were positive, and some, very negative. A few of the laity came to the Local Church having been de-churched (they didn't plan on going to church, but "church" came to them). This was important to note with the layperson who met

the church musician while playing music out in the community. Others came to the Local Church looking for a church home. For several, the main facility was an important connection between culture (that of coffee), and the Christian community.

Question Two: What teachings, ideas, and programs have been influential in helping you connect with others in your (non-church) community? I was curious what teaching had resonated with laity (especially as this addresses the other side of a similar question asked of leadership), what they've heard, if they've owned their faith in the community, and how they've done so.

Layperson one said he was initially attracted to the church because (during worship services), they prayed for creative people and entrepreneurs, which was a far different way to pray for the community. He described it as a Christ-centered church, where everything in the Sunday service (including Communion) was intended to lead worshippers to connect with the Lord, which works well for bringing people close to God. He appreciated the emphasis put on ministry and mission done by the people, versus the divide that often exists between clergy “professionals” and laity. He enjoyed the fact that he didn't have “to be a missionary, or ordained, in order to live out his witness with his employees, or industry colleagues.” Furthermore, having a female preacher (whom he regarded as one of the best preachers on staff), was a very strong statement in today's conservative church, and a drawing card for women, especially.

On a different topic, he commented that earlier in his Christian walk, it was intimidating for him to think about *doing* evangelism, contrasted with the church's encouragement to live out his faith through his normal life and way of being. On the contrary, he wasn't personally seeing

people coming into the Local Church who were previously unbelievers, but simply de-churched and burned out from other versions of church.

Layperson two said that the Gospel of Luke series was very pivotal for him. This was because he was already concerned about poverty, and involved in this area before attending the church. For the first time in a long while, he saw a church community that aligned with his day-to-day concerns and passions. Before this church, he saw a lot of social good happening, but none of it was occurring in the church.

Layperson three commented that church clergy and staff live what they preach, and are good examples of how Jesus would operate today; this has been influential for his understanding of walking through life as a Christ-follower, and in the world (especially as an artist). In addition, church leaders been committed to serving others, and not trying to fix people's behaviors (drinking, smoking, etc.), which has been a huge change from his upbringing, and perspective of Christianity in general. There was once a time when he felt like he didn't fit in anywhere else, but this church has provided such a place. Because of this, he sees his strength being that of hospitality; helping others belong, just like he needed the church to be a place of belonging.

Layperson four responded that he became involved, because it appeared obvious people were there for the right reasons (because they wanted to be there, no out of obligation), and it was a genuine family. As a result of a previously negative experiences (rigid and legalistic religiosity), he was surprised by the church's lack of negativity and manipulation, and in specific, the lack of guilt and fear. For example, he shared a story when one of the members of the Local Church's staff team, said that his music needed work; this was hard to hear. Yet within

this candid statement, he knew this person’s heart was in the right place, and that he was saying this for a bigger reason.

Thus, his experience has been that the hearts of church staff are wide open, they really “walk their talk and operate as a team”. All of this has had a profound experience on him as his music was previously done alone, and not the communal experience he’d found there. In addition, because of the excellence they have in music and coffee, it was easy to invite people to experience the church.

Layperson five said that the church’s impact in the city has been disproportionate to their size; they are a reasonably small church, yet they have a very big impact. He and his family moved with the sense they wanted to be connected relationally in their neighborhood; this idea has been repeatedly affirmed by the leadership as one of the core needs of the city, and one of the primary mandates of the church. They feel affirmed in this style of informal ministry, and have opened up their home on a regular basis as a large part of their family life and ministry.

Each of the responses show evidence that laity are understanding and grasping a Kingdom-mentality towards ministry and mission; it is not something that clergy and staff *do* (as paid professionals of the congregation), but that clergy and staff enable laypeople to *be* in their spheres of influence and passion.

Question Three: What symbols have been significant for you (and others at the church), and why are they important? I was curious what types of symbols apostolic communities find relevant, what they represent, and how they influence beliefs and practices.

Layperson one said that the main facility was a consistent metaphor of incarnational ministry, not as a “church building”, but as a shared space where people of faith could create

culture and community with others outside of the church community. As an example, he referred to the head barista, who serves him “coffee during the week, and Communion on Sunday mornings.”

Another symbol was more of a “missional moment”, captured in a concert at a local brewery. At this event, several band members (who attend the church), played songs that were great musically, but not “Christian music”. At that event, he was also thrilled to see many church people with others who he didn’t recognize, relating very naturally and intermingling (rather than clumped together, off to the side).

Layperson two responded that an important symbol was the “centering” of the worship service around the Eucharist. In the early days of the church, they would have worship in the evening, then eat a meal together at the end of the service, after Communion. This was an important symbol for him as community was built around the dinner table, as well as Eucharist.

Another important symbol was the back side of the bulletin, where the church had a narrative about the larger Church’s global and historical journey, unfolding for 2000 years. This was different than a typical church’s perspective, helping him grasp that he, and the church, was part of a bigger picture; a symbol that the church was balanced between the ancient, the historical and the relevant present.

Layperson three said that as an art major, he was immediately impressed by the aesthetic beauty and symbolism of the service, including its liturgy and appeal to tradition. He appreciated the practicing of 2000 year old customs, the ancient forms of prayer, call and response, etc., as well as Communion every week. Another important symbol for him was the large sign on Sunday mornings (near the front of the stage), that read, “you are all loved”. He felt that was an

important message for the congregation's identity and mission. A final symbol was the design of the main facility, as a way to meet people (he worked there on a daily basis).

Layperson four mentioned that Communion, and the open table, was a very important symbol. He believed that was important, quoted one of the leaders as saying, "you can be Jewish if you want, it doesn't matter". He remembered one of the clergy also preaching that, "being saved is like being safe. Even though you may not feel saved and haven't had this great revelation, still you are because you know you are".

Layperson five commented that his home group was an important symbol, because it was his family's ministry, and the main place where they see God working. Their home group has talked about being more missionally-focused, and has begun to be involved with a Somali family in their neighborhood, who need help.

It was fascinating how they responded to the question of symbols; some chose more obvious and concrete symbols (for example, the main facility, and Communion). Others, however, were more unique, including alluding to symbols as "missional moments," as well as other symbols like verbiage in the bulletin, a sign, and their home.²⁴⁶ It is equally interesting to hear the sound bites that people remember from sermons (whether they're accurate or not). This include the fourth person's comment about "you can be Jewish" (referring to Communion) as well as a person knowing their saved because "you know you are".

Question Four: What have leaders have said and done, helping you to better embrace Christ or his mission in the world? I was curious how laypeople think and converse about

²⁴⁶ Interestingly, this "moment" represented at least three typical dichotomies brought together in one event: the dichotomy of the sacred (Christians in a band), being in the "secular" territory of a bar; the dichotomy of a band of Christians playing "secular" songs, but playing them with artistry, and beauty; finally, the dichotomy of Christians who attended the event, intermingled relationally among unchurched people.

spiritual formation, and growth. I wanted to learn how the church was not only reaching, but developing and forming people.

Layperson one said that he was introduced to a lot of new thinking in the church; for example, recently he'd been reading an article by Dorothy Sayers entitled, "Why Work". This article has been helping him to think about his calling in the world as part of mission, not separate from it. This is something that church leaders had been teaching regularly: leaders' responsibility is to help laypeople discover their calling ("what's at their core"), and live that out in the world. Since their message has been consistent (that they are a "mission-centered church"), he understand that his fundamental calling is to be part of that, by creating good designs for God, first and for the community, second.

He added to this that the Local Church was a place for people who want to get involved (not just spectate), and who have spiritual questions that get answered over meals, doing life together and not so much Sunday mornings. Sunday worship services are about getting help in pain, kind of thing, focused on the Gospels and not on lesser matters. He did not feel that this focus made a difference in his desire (or lack thereof) to do God's will in his daily life.

He referenced a story where a church leader was approached about a couple who were core in the church, but co-habiting. The Pastor approached the couple about the concerns, but listened to their response and dealt with it in a pastoral way (the couple was not having sex, but living together before marriage for financial purposes). A few others in the Local Church had dealt with it in a more "judgmental way", but this leader's approach was a great example of adaptability. He encouraged the couple they could remain in the church and still be accepted, even though it was not a typical situation.

Layperson two said that he's excited about the rootedness and involvement of the Local Church as a cornerstone in the community, and the similarity between that and black churches, who are often also very rooted in the real lives and needs of their neighborhoods. He continued, saying that a lot of success reaching people has come through the Camphouse and that, for many, it has become a part of the rhythm of their lives. Case in point, a couple was recently married in the main facility, and a number of city councilmen meet regularly there for coffee. It's very easy to invite people to the worship service, especially when they are already familiar with the space, and know many people who are in the main facility regularly, but part of the Local Church community.

Layperson three said that He immediately noticed a very strong emphasis on excellence including in their music. Until that point he hated Christian music. He also thought that the preaching was very down to earth, and those who were up front were just very normal and approachable. Before this he'd always seen church as either social hour or punching the ticket. This was different. It wasn't what the church was supposed to do for you, but you being a part of God's Kingdom. He added that he appreciated the lack of Old Testament emphasis, as he saw the Old Testament as teachings (for example, an eye for an eye) that were in conflict with Jesus and the New Testament.

Conversely, he viewed the Local Church's message as simple and consistent; "you are loved, treasured, and (whatever your sexual preferences), you are the same". He said that the messages were optimistic and very positive, which is important for him especially with his background in negative, legalistic Christianity. His father was very harsh about gays, especially reinforced by his military background, so he appreciated the church's constant emphasis on love, acceptance and the invitation for everyone to come to Jesus; the church stays away from public

stances on social issues, and that's a good thing. He believes that people should still speak into each other's lives, but do so carefully, lovingly and with earned credibility; interestingly, he viewed this often done best by clergy, and always with phrasing like "can you please help me understand this?" In our discussion about homosexuality, layperson three talked about "not weighing sins"; since the world is broken, we should love people in their brokenness. As a men's group leader, he believed that an openly gay man would be completely accepted at the church.

Layperson four stated that the Local Church has done a good job of communicating that the church needs to be a place where people can disagree and still be in fellowship; that it is ok to have religious and political beliefs as separate from one another. He appreciates the nuance of stewardship versus membership, and feels that the former has a more positive connotation than the latter. There are a lot of ways to connect (groups, book clubs, dinner groups, etc.), which has not only been good for him and his family, but for newcomers. When his wife had a miscarriage, the leadership and staff were very supportive, even with changes in size.

Layperson five had very little to say about how leaders have helped him embrace Christ or his mission in the community. He was not negative about the leadership of the Local Church, yet didn't mention them as an influential factor in his life or ministry. He made a few comments that bordered on an appreciation for the greater work and leadership of the church, but didn't directly ascribe such credit to the leadership. He alluded to a video series about reaching Howard University, and the Local Church's work with widows as being an encouragement and example to him. He has been positively impacted by a video series entitled, "Change Your World", but did not provide a context for the video (if it was done in the context of a sermon series, Bible study, etc).

Respondents chose a variety of ways to answer this question about leaders' teachings and practices. One answer appealed to having grasped the concept of living out the Kingdom in his workplace; another responded with a helpful anecdote about a Pastor's thoughtful and adaptive intervention for a couple living together before marriage; another spoke through the context of Christian music being done with excellence, and another through the messages they're hearing about love and acceptance. All answers had a sphere in which they heard and applied these messages, more than likely the spheres where they applied their passion (community, arts, worship, etc.). It was also interesting that there were many references to teachings, and some of the more typical practices (preaching, pastoral involvement), but no direct references to street-level practices that we may find in Saint Patrick or Paul. This of course does not mean such practices do not exist, just important to note their absence thereof.

Question Five: Are there things about the church (teaching, process, etc) - whether intentional or unintentional - that have deterred you from entering into community, or growing spiritually? I was curious if there were teachings or practices of the church that were hindering the process of people embracing Christ, or deterring them from pursuing engagement within the Christian community. I wanted to learn what teachings or practices keep apostolic churches from being effective reaching, discipling and releasing people.

Layperson one said that the Local Church has been "strong about giving", and that has been "hard for him", especially as a former Roman Catholic who doesn't respond well to "feeling guilt-tripped". He commented how the delivery about money feels awkward and the offering following the sermon, at times "contrived". Furthermore, he's uncomfortable with how

diversified the church is, and how it is so lacking in money; perhaps spread too far and beyond God's intentions.

He continued by stating that the Local Church needs to remember, "Jesus came not just to bring peace, but to bring a sword."²⁴⁷ He was concerned that there's so much emphasis on peace, where's the fight? Furthermore, the church has a real opportunity to invest in people who have amazing giftedness that can be used for Christ in the world; however, he inferred with this biblical reference, that the Local Church must be careful not to simply allow people to remain nominal, but be taken from spiritual lost-ness and be "poured into". He added concern that at least one of the leaders "seemed to like conflict" (rather than avoid it), and was concerned how they will approach larger issues of conflict as a church, being that they have had such a small amount of conflict around more important matters.

Layperson two said that he is concerned about the isolation that comes with growth, and money being pushed too hard; he worries about it being off-putting for others. He is concerned also about the denomination's involvement with the Local Church, as a center for church planting. There was a concern that this relationship may become mercenary and negatively affect their sense of community on a local level.

Layperson three said that recent changes of adding multiple staff have created some organizational confusion (who was responsible for what). The accessibility of senior staff was a more recent issue, including even where their offices are located since they'd been moved. This inferred a sense of loss, whereby he used to know where to find people, and how to access people in leadership, he doesn't any longer.

²⁴⁷ This statement referred to Jesus' comment in Matthew 10:34: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." The inference in layperson one's comment, was that there's a lack of conflict and "sharpening" (one person upon another) within the Local Church's ministry.

Layperson four commented that he had a difficult time mixing money and church, until he began working for the church playing guitar. He feels that he now has a better understanding of what it takes to make something like a church, function financially. On another topic, he finds hell to be a very difficult concept, yet didn't apply this comment specifically to the church. The fourth layperson also brought up the point that he made a decision to abstain from taking Communion, until such a time that he felt his commitment to Christ reflected it. As a respecter of persons, he appreciates the fact that the Local Church is very open to people who are different, and doesn't want to see the church make people uncomfortable.

Layperson five said that he does not see the present large number of staff as a long term solution, and was concerned about the finances of the church as well as the labor-intensive nature of the church planting model they had chosen.²⁴⁸ On the positive side, he sees chapels addressing this need to grow smaller and branch out as they grow bigger. He is also unsure if the model of the main facility (which, as a reminder, operates as a coffee-shop by day and community center at night) was wise financially. Although he could see a positive connection between the main facility and the neighborhoods around it, whether it was effective for the Kingdom, he's not sure. He was unclear if the church is reaching the unchurched (because conversion at the Local Church is very subtle) and would have a greater sense of their evangelistic effectiveness if they had baptisms. On the contrary, he added that because their view of Communion is as a sign of people's acceptance of Christ, that's an indication of where people are in their faith.

Several responses were agreed in their concern about growth and over-diversification. The words used to express that fundamental concern, were varied (i.e. being spread too thin, being a planting center for the denomination, the availability of staff, etc.). Several other

²⁴⁸ At this point, the church had over 30 staff; all but two were raising their own support. Also, his comment regarding church planting models was referring to the fact that the plants are called chapels, with their own pastor, however retaining many functions at the main church (bookkeeping, staff meetings, music leadership, etc.).

comments stand out, including layperson one, who mentioned that he was concerned there was such an emphasis on “peace” that the “sword” was not apparent. In other words, that “iron sharpening iron” is lacking.²⁴⁹

Second, layperson five had several important comments: that he could see the value of the main facility in the community, but was unsure of its effectiveness for the Kingdom; that he was unaware if people were coming to the Lord, because of the lack of baptisms; that the number of people taking Communion, helped him to see more clearly who had accepted Christ.

This next section will seek to analyze these various responses, pulling together positive characteristics, as well as concerns.

Part Five: Analysis

I began this research with a question about apostolic characteristics, desirous to learn the beliefs and practices of those who are successfully bridging social, cultural and spiritual divides.

By analyzing the interviews and responses, I have gained the following positive insights:

- The importance of excellence and beauty (for example, in coffee, art and music), with its practical relationship to the main facility, the church’s staffing, worship and witness.
- The value of collaborating with culture in areas such as art, media, education, commerce, etc.; building bridges through shared God-given passions.
- A renewed appreciation for the efficacy of the gospels to convey Jesus as social justice-advocate and champion of the marginalized; this resonates palpably with many passions, concerns and needs of the unchurched.
- The recognition that symbols are important (the main facility, an open Communion table, a family living downtown, diversity, a missional moment, etc.) because they are missionally effective and convey important truths for the Church and world.
- The value of strong alignment between the vision casting by church leadership, and understanding and embrace of that vision among the laity.

²⁴⁹ Proverbs 27:17 states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

- The power of the church’s resounding message: “come as you are”; whoever you are (or have been), Jesus welcomes you.

I was able to learn from the positive, but I was able to listen and gain from areas of concern and potential weakness. Without going into great detail (analysis and critique will be covered in chapter 5), I was left interviews with concerns and questions:

- First, although I heard a strong focus on reaching people, I heard far less about spiritual formation, catechesis and discipleship (including that of children).
 - Question: “Is it essential that apostolically-focused churches have a balanced focus on other areas such as worship and discipleship or is it appropriate to allow for a discipleship ‘vacuum’—keeping people in their natural missional relationships—where they must search out their own pathway for spiritual formation?”
- Second, there was a resounding concern from leaders and laity about their financial stability, which included not only the number of appeals but their intensity; a majority were concerned about being spread too thin in regards to finances, and the Local Church’s ministry overall.
 - Question: “What are better ways to motivate people (that are positive in nature) rather than using intensity and perhaps even, coercion?”
- A third concern was the avoidance of discussion by leadership regarding sexuality, which included its lack of integration with the Bible, Communion and membership.
 - Question: “What positives and negatives occur with an avoidance of sexuality?”

As alluded to in chapter one, there were changes between my original thesis proposal—submitted in the summer of 2013—and the objectives presented in chapters 1 and 5. If I were to do this research over again, first, I would write questions that were a better fit with the culture I was interviewing (my initial questions had to be adjusted because many questions used dichotomous language that would have made the interviews awkward, and the responses, inaccurate).²⁵⁰ Second, I would have written fewer questions; the interviews themselves were often near two hours in length, with no more than five questions (I originally had several more

²⁵⁰ Dichotomous language includes the use of pejorative terms and binary labels, such as “non-Christians”, “secular” versus “sacred”, “lost people” versus Christians who are “found”, etc.

questions proposed). Third, I would have narrowed the amount of research; what I had planned would have taken far too much time to research, consolidate, and lengthened this paper beyond a reasonable amount.²⁵¹ In the same light, through the research process I learned that a few well-written questions can yield a great amount of data. In retrospect, the questions were well-written, and much was gained from the interviews.

This chapter's research (which includes the Movement and Local Church interviews), together with the work of St. Patrick, will be evaluated in chapter 5—in light of the biblical and theological issues that were raised in chapter 2. With this in mind, we now head into our final chapter.

²⁵¹ In addition to the research for this chapter, I distributed twenty-three questionnaires to members of The River, which has been consolidated and analyzed for future use, but not included. I also initially proposed several focus groups and one-on-one interviews, which again, would have lengthened the amount of time writing, as well as the length of, this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5—CONCLUSION

In chapter 1, we listed five major objectives. This conclusion seeks to demonstrate how these objectives have been fulfilled and presents findings of chapters two through four, summarizing positive insights, concerns and questions.

The First Objective

The first objective concerned writing questions for leaders and laity in the local church, conducting on-site interviews and notating responses. The purpose was to discover apostolic beliefs and practices, which are active in the local church; the responses from these interviews are presented in chapter 4.

The information gleaned from only eight interviews, was prolific; the analysis of these interviews have brought to light over 30 positive characteristics (which have been consolidated by theme to reduce their number), at least 10 major concerns, and a number of questions that will create future reflection.

In regards to positives, the local church chosen was extremely well-suited for this study. It offered a very strong comparison, and helpful contrast, to the other movements (the Celtic Christian movement and Missional Church movement) which were a part of this study. This particular Local Church demonstrated an understanding of apostolic beliefs and values that went far beyond that of any church of which I am aware. Arising from these core beliefs, valuable practices were being attempted; attempts that were unsuccessful were not looked upon as failures, but either tweaked or substituted. Observing the various practices were as helpful as the beliefs themselves; one could most often look “backwards” from the practice, only to experience the power and efficacy of strong missional values.

However, although most practices were aligned to a core *belief*, the connection between several of these beliefs and the Bible, were unclear. Some of these were in fact, tensions and paradoxes that will always exist within life and faith; others, however, appeared to be imbalanced at best—and at their worst, betrayed a clear integration between the Bible, ministry and mission.

The Second Objective

The second objective concerned the discovery of apostolic beliefs and practices, through a biblical-theological study of the Old and New Testaments—from the story of Adam and Eve, through the Old Testament and to the Pauline Epistles—with most exegetical energy applied to passages in Ephesians 4 and Acts 17. This work is presented in chapter 2.

Through this research, God’s apostolic heart is demonstrated as He pursues mankind out of His mercy again and again. This climaxes in the Old Testament through the calling of Israel to be a “light to the nations” (Isa. 49:6).

Turning our gaze to the New Testament, we discovered a biblical-theological continuity within the God-head, and the calling of a missional people. The Father’s decision to send, and the willingness of the Son and Spirit to be sent, demonstrated that God, as well as His purposes for Israel and the Church, had not changed. Moreover, we examined in greater detail God’s call for all his children, to bear His image in the world.

A majority of the chapter was focused on exegetical work within Ephesians 4:1-16 and Acts 17:16-34. From these two passages we learned invaluable lessons about the nature and purpose of the gifts: they are to be practiced in the character of Christ; they are for the purpose of unity; they are given to each one, by Christ Himself, as spoils of victory; they are to equip and

build up the local church. We gained a better understanding that without the use of all five (distinctive yet interdependent) gifts, there are unfortunate consequences—a lack of maturity, falling into heresy, and ineffectiveness to function properly.

Through Luke's narrative of Paul in Athens, we were able to see at least one of the five gifts (the apostolic), in action; it was Paul's intentional engagement with one of the most difficult of Roman audiences, the Athenian academic elite. We learned once again, valuable apostolic beliefs and practices: the essential work of a holy distress, and its relationship to action; the crucial role of a thoughtful rhetoric which involved a planned delivery, Old Testament foundations, a contextualized approach and the centrality of Jesus and the resurrection; and finally, we were able to be encouraged by positive results that are the natural reward of missional practices. From the two powerful passages we see the need for apostolicity that is as biblically faithful as it is strategic, thoughtful and planned.

The Third Objective

The third objective regarded the study of the Celtic Christian movement under St. Patrick, the intention of which was to learn, first, from one of the most innovative and relevant figures in classical antiquity; second, the introduction of a historical parallel, to contemporary missional examples. This material is reflected in chapter 3.

Through the life of Patrick we discovered how the painful experiences of his youth were used by God as part of a larger, formative and redemptive plan. We explored the cultural context of the Celts—an environment far different than Patrick's Roman roots—which required the construction of bridges that were social, cultural, geographical and spiritual in nature.

Through the ministry of Patrick we discovered valuable beliefs: his commitment to Scripture, the Trinity, a creedal faith, and the importance of God's call to him, and to mission. We also saw his apostolic practices, habits, and patterns of behavior: Patrick's identification with the Celts; the thoughtful and intentional approach with which he contextualized and adapted the gospel in a pastoral, indigenous and integrated way.

Descriptions of Celtic Christianity must include the genius with which they balanced the formation of a distinctively Christian lifestyle (with evidence of spiritual disciplines and sacraments) and appreciation for the Church and its traditions, within a social community that was both porous and inviting. However, Patrick's legacy was perhaps most effected by his simple love and devotion for God, demonstrated most acutely by his ability to handle conflict (from within and without), with integrity and grace that was formed on the hillsides of Ireland as a teenage slave.

The Fourth Objective

The fourth objective involved an overview of the Missional Church Movement, in order to benefit from its beliefs and practices, providing a broader context for local church research. This material was presented in chapter 4.

The Movement provided us with a snapshot of apostolic characteristics, primarily from a theoretical and ideological perspective—a “big picture”, so to speak, of principles that undergird the movement. This provided a more comprehensive, confirming voice, that the work of local expressions are, in fact, streams that flow from a larger missional source.

Beginning with a brief history of the Movement's seminal influences, we perused its core values, leaving their application up to the local church. This, of course, aligns with several

implicit principles within the Movement (contextualization, integration and adaptation). This act, incidentally, is in stark contrast to a more recent time when church planters received not values, but step by step practices from a model or a handbook.²⁵²

Movement thinkers who are defining, guiding and shaping the conversation, have constructed a series of robust theological pillars that support their philosophical beliefs, and common practices. These include: the *missio Dei* as a starting point for a basic understanding that we participate with God in mission (not vice versa); the much-needed pairing of a Kingdom missiology with a pragmatic ecclesiology; a bias away from the church as primarily attractational, to fundamentally, incarnational; a revitalization of the relationship between hospitality and mission; the recovery of a redemptive, holistic gospel, that returns people's passions back into the public square (in areas like the arts, science, technology and social justice); a recovery of the five-fold offices, principally emphasizing the need for apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic initiative; finally, a healthy understanding that Christians are to build upon God's common grace and natural revelation within culture, compared to the naïve assumptions of yesterday-that our way of knowing must be their way of understanding, and our way of being, their becoming.

The Fifth Objective

The fifth objective concerned analysis of the material in chapters 2,3 and 4, which is the purpose of this chapter. In this regard, we now turn to our final piece: the assessment of positives and negatives within our research findings.

²⁵² This was the Willow Creek Association's methodology of church planting, one that Bill Hybels later regretted in public. In mid-2007 Willow Creek Church released the results of a multi-year study on the effectiveness of their programs and philosophy of ministry. These findings are detailed in a book entitled *Reveal: Where are You?*, by Cally Parkinson and Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Willow Creek Community Church.

Final evaluation

In order to complete our analysis, we will seek to answer the following four questions: first, “what positive points can be found in all three samples?”;²⁵³ second, “which positive points are unique to only one or two samples?”; third, “which concerns can be found in all three samples?”; and fourth, “which concerns are unique to only one or two samples?”

Question #1: Positive Points In All Samples

Biblical-theological Foundations. All three movements demonstrated strong biblical and theological understandings of apostolicity, with one exception being the Local Church’s theology and practice of the sacraments (see below in “concerns”).²⁵⁴ The Movement’s emphasis upon a lay-led, indigenous, contextual integration of life and mission has brought about a creative, innovative and entrepreneurial missional environment—where, for example, vocational passions have become missional opportunities.²⁵⁵ It has also brought about a re-envisioning of biblical themes that for many, had become sterile and irrelevant; for example, the values of goodness, truth and beauty, that influence many of their decisions. This is also true in the area of spiritual formation (though there are concerns noted below in that area as well), where a person *on* mission is not gathering inert information, but training for the sake of transformation and orthopraxy—put to good use as those who require it are at one’s very doorstep.

²⁵³ The term, “samples” is being used to refer in short form to the Missional Church movement, the Celtic Christian movement and Local Church interviews.

²⁵⁴ By way of reminder, in chapter 4 “Local Church” was capitalized to identify a particular church where interviews were completed—to protect anonymity and avoid confusion with its common usage.

²⁵⁵ This is not new. We see this in Paul’s tent-making enterprise and the relationships he developed through this vocation (Acts 18:1-3).

Five-fold Gifts. All three showed strong evidence of five-fold (A.P.E.P.T.) ministry. In addition to the apostolic, the prophetic ministry is being recovered and evangelistic ministry is being strengthened by a holistic emphasis on the gospel.²⁵⁶

The Importance of Space and Place. The value of space and place were not explicit within the research. However, they emerged upon analysis and were supported by all three samples. St. Patrick understood the importance of space and place wherein he approached tribal chiefs to gain access and proximity to Celtic settlements. Local Church leaders took on great fiscal liability to rent their main facility because of its aesthetics and strategic value in the city. A belief in space and place, has also emerged in missional church writings.²⁵⁷ Apostolic individuals walk in the rhythms of their communities in a common place; conversely, communities like the Local Church have created common space to related to the unchurched through establishing a visible and tangible *place*.²⁵⁸ In Acts 17:17, proximity (space) to the people, and a place (the Areopagus) from which to preach the gospel, were critical to Paul's success.

Holistic Good News. All three samples asserted the gospel as holistic good news. Social justice was not looked upon as an event, but an outflow of their lives which were socially integrated into those of the unchurched; acts of kindness were a natural response to the needs of the unchurched as they surfaced day-by-day.

The Reality of God's Call. The mutual emphasis of all three samples on the reality of God's call, include also the possibility of suffering and distress as a prelude to (and companion

²⁵⁶ See J.R. Woodward's book, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*, and his chapter on the prophetic.

²⁵⁷ See also: <http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/blog/58>

²⁵⁸ Frost and Hirsch approach these types of issues in *Shaping of Things to Come*. Their early apostolic success was a the formation of a Christian community, emerging out of (and embedded within) an art studio.

in) that Divine summons. We witnessed this in Paul's reaction to idolatry (Acts 17:16) as well as the life and call of St. Patrick, who was brought to tears at the call to return to Ireland. A quick perusal of Movement writings will yield a fertile crop of grief and distress over the nature of things ecclesiastical and missional, as well as a call forward. In the Local Church, more than 30 staff have felt called to serve at great cost, raising their own funds, rather than find a more secure and lucrative position. There is much more that could be said about the sacrifices, and suffering that is happening in the Movement and Local Church, because many believe these are pivotal times for the Church and world.

Come As You Are. All three samples highlighted the importance of reaching out to those who have been marginalized, polarized and oppressed. St. Patrick and the Local Church spoke boldly to the importance of women in leadership. Though this is only implicit rather than explicit in the Movement, a majority of the their leaders and churches hold a similar view.

Optimism. All three samples emphasize building upon the good, rather than tearing down the old. This emerged theologically in the doctrines of common grace, natural revelation, and Christian humanism.²⁵⁹ The latter two shared a disdain for public statements in worship and the public square, on social and political issues. Though there were exceptions to this (for example, Patrick's public opposition to slavery and the Movement's public stance on women), they were infrequent. Examples include: St. Patrick's redirection of the warrior mentality, and nature-worship; the Movement's strong theologies of identification and participation with local concerns and needs;²⁶⁰ the Local Church's commitment to participate and collaborate with the

²⁵⁹ Gregory Wolfe has worked to revive this lost tradition. See: www.gregorywolfe.com/incarnation.html

²⁶⁰ Tim Keller's *Center Church*, is an example of this in book and project form.

City in providing low-cost space for civic events and countless acts of service to benefit neighbors and their communities.

Vision Alignment. All three samples demonstrate positive alignment between the vision leaders' communicate, and the laity's ability to understand, own and participate in that vision. This was clear in St. Patrick's ministry within his lifetime and well beyond as Celts were indigenously raised into leadership, carrying forward Patrick's original vision. This is also true of a large number of Movement churches, who have inherited essential beliefs and practices from other churches, as well as Movement communicators. Finally, this was clear in the Local Church interviews of laity, who articulately mimicked the words and actions of their leaders. In all three samples we see that apostolic vision is grasped when it is a simple, palpable and practical model that laypeople can see, understand and join.

Safe Places. All three emphasize creating safe places for people to "be", as well as to ask questions. This emerged as a part of St. Patrick's ministry as they conversed with townspeople and invited people back to experience Christian hospitality. This topic has received extensive attention in the Movement and was mentioned as a common practice at least twice (in different ways) in Local Church interviews.²⁶¹

Question #2: Positive Points Unique To One Or Two Samples

Stewardship substituted for Membership. The Local Church's creative decision to use the term "stewardship" in place of "membership" was a practical solution to deal with skepticism many have about organizational commitment (especially if it is done in a way that excludes others), in contrast to the idea of stewardship which implies the choice to own of something attendees believe in. This practice was also a concern, and raised additional questions.

²⁶¹ See chapters on "shalom spirituality" and "safe places" in Hammond's book, *Sentness*.

Question #3: Concerns In All Samples

Biblical and Theological Underdevelopment. The research of the Movement and Local Church exposed biblical and theological underdevelopment.²⁶² If Movement leaders and churches—of which the Local Church is a part—do not balance mission with worship, biblical formation and discipleship (which includes catechesis, spiritual formation and pastoral care), a host of problems will result.²⁶³ St. Patrick was able to deal with these potential threats with an emphasis on the Scriptures, a creedal faith and establishing spiritual practices for the rhythms of the day. However, that was in a much different social context (for example, they often lived in close proximity, worked together as part of an agrarian society, etc.). To be missionally effective today, both the Movement and the Local Church will require a biblically-balanced approach, with practical measures to repair a laxity in the critical functions of equipping and building (Eph. 4:12). Without said re (and *with* their emphasis on social justice), both the Movement and a Local Church could be only a “stone’s throw” from theological liberalism. This is not unprecedented in emerging missional movements and their leaders.²⁶⁴

Avoiding Important Matters. Alongside the positive value of building upon the good, are two words of caution: First, there was a tendency in the latter two samples, to use fallacious language (we just want “acceptance”, love”, and “peace”) as a way to avoid important matters. The reference that we “shouldn’t judge others”, can be used as a smoke-screen for impropriety

²⁶² Movement writings and affiliated churches have often lacked strong biblical teaching, discipleship and spiritual formation because of an imbalanced reaction to the dominance of the pastor-teacher model, an erroneous assumption that many of their people have the motivation and ability to seek out what they need a lack of biblical and theological training in their leaders, and a lack of complementarity within their leadership nexus with pastoring and teaching gifts that equip and build.

²⁶³ I witnessed this in the Local Church interviews in the following ways: a Marcionite dichotomy viewing the Old Testament as less applicable than the new and the Law as opposed to grace; a false polarity drawn between the Gospels as narrative and the epistles as doctrinal; and the idea that justice and judgment are mutually exclusive with the love of God. All of these sound bites lead to the need for more biblical instruction.

²⁶⁴ There are some very public leaders within the Movement who tread close to this line.

and disobedience. There is a difference between having judgement and casting judgment; between discernment, and standing above others as though lesser. The real issue may be that people want to have the freedom to sin, and accuse others of being judgmental in order to avoid confrontation that they are sinful; by lodging an accusation, they avoid indictment.

A second word of caution is the proclivity to react against the past, but with an imbalanced approach that creates greater problems in the present. For example, the Local Church has been successful at reaching de-churched people (many of whom have been wounded by legalism), leaders could create a false environment where very little could be talked about that was of serious consequence to the faith community. Even within the Local Church, such individuals could find themselves unable to deal with important matters of conflict (whether they were in regards to theology, relationships, etc.). This was reflected in two of the responses.

Sexuality. This leads to the issue of sexuality (including issues having to do with homosexuality, co-habitation, sex before marriage, etc.), which was avoided by Patrick as well as the Local Church. From my knowledge of Movement leaders and churches, it is more common to have a relaxed approach in this area than it is to see a public statement.²⁶⁵

My concern, first, is for the latter two samples to engage in forthright, biblical dialogue. The nuances of the sexuality issues are complex, requiring honest and loving dialogue rather than simply avoidance. It is an opportunity for Christians to show that love for others and a desire for truth, can meet. By not addressing the issue at all, we could send a message of permissiveness. The hope here is a very welcome spirit within the church, while at the same time a desire to maintain orthodoxy. A related concern is the matter of anti-nomianism and the

²⁶⁵ It is equally infrequent to see Movement leaders and churches that are outspokenly in their support. Most Movement books avoid the issue unless written to deal with it specifically.

“trickle-down effect”. If many of the more potent and public issues of the church (like sexuality) are avoided, are other important matters as easily dismissed for the sake of “peace”?

The Loss of a Loving Yet Bold Apologetic. Sadly, with the latter two samples’ emphasis on what some a “communal” or “embodied” apologetic, it appears that a dynamic verbal apologetic has been tossed aside. For example, what role does preaching have in the defense of biblical truth—especially when it comes to answering common spiritual questions and concerns of the unchurched? By striving to preserve the peace, do we also not challenge people’s ignorance or misinformation—regarding biblical and philosophical beliefs?

Question #2: Concerns Unique To One Or Two Samples

Discipleship. In regards to the Local Church, there were several areas of concern that all stemmed from the same issue. In my Local Church interviews, there was little to no mention of Bible study (only that of preaching), the spiritual disciplines, or discipleship; on the contrary, there were several indications that discipleship was sorely lacking. There is great wisdom in seeking a breadth of influence *with* spiritual depth, not in lieu of it.

One counter to this idea is that by creating a lapse in discipleship, Local Church leaders’ are attempting to keep Christians from unhealthy separation from the unchurched around education, discipleship and spiritual practices. In other words, they keep laity poised in the world rather than regathering for education and fellowship—leaving space for laity to pursue their own spiritual growth. If this is true, a number of important questions arise: are laity going to actually seek out such formation and doctrinal guidance, and when they do so where will they find it? Are laity going to become compromised by their involvement in culture because they lack strong biblical teaching and pastoral leadership in the midst of it?

The Sacraments. The Local Church also lacked a strong connection between their practice of the sacraments, and the Bible, appearing to shape the sacraments to fit their *mission*. Although this may be consistent with Frost and Hirsch's theology (Christology-missiology-ecclesiology), it is not consistent with the Bible's teaching on Communion or baptism.²⁶⁶ Regarding open Communion there are several important questions: what is the meaning, purpose and scope of the Table's 'fence'? Is it appropriate, in certain contexts, to have an open table?

Another similar area of concern involved the lack of baptisms (as a result of a strong emphasis on belonging before believing). However, important questions need to be asked: What are the negative consequences of lacking in baptisms, especially since they are commanded by Christ? What is the danger of using Communion as a substitute for baptism, as a sign that people have accepted Christ?

Inclusion or Inclusive. The Local Church's creative decision to use the term "stewardship", in lieu of "membership", was a thoughtful way to: have a level whereby people can commit to the church beyond mere attendance; avoid the "membership" nomenclature; understand what stewardship looks like in the Local Church.

However, even in post-Christian settings, is our goal total inclusion, or to be inclusive? In other words, is exclusion always inappropriate? My mind is drawn back to the early church practices of Hippolytus, including interviewing newcomers, dismissing pre-converts before the sharing of the "holy kiss" (the passing of the peace) and Eucharist.²⁶⁷ Although I understand very much their challenge, this brings a number of questions: "Is there a time and place for exclusion,

²⁶⁶ In his book, *Salt, Light and a City*, Michael Frost admitted that this formula may have "had unintended consequences" (p. ix). Adapting the Church's sacraments (the theology and practice of Communion and baptism) around its *mission* could be one of those "unintended consequences"—especially in light of 1 Corinthians 11:29-31.

²⁶⁷ See <http://www.jesusdust.com/2011/02/what-is-normal-christian-conversion.html> for a brief but substantive overview of the early church catechumenate.

and if so, when and where is it, and how are lines to be drawn?" "When people ascribe to membership, are they ascribing to believe the church's essential beliefs, or simply to respect what the church believes?"

Conclusion

Albert Einstein said: "No problem can be solved by the same kind of thinking that created it."²⁶⁸ Returning back to where we started in chapter 1: it is going to take creative, intuitive and boldly innovative apostolic individuals and churches to cross social, cultural and spiritual divides—recapturing generations adrift.

One dominant theme that emerged from our research is that *how* this is done, is as important as the fact *that* it is done. In the spirit of Einstein's maxim we must find new and better ways to lead from our present reality to a preferred future: churches must shift their thinking from success in attracting spectators to *significance* as they use incarnational practices such as integrated spirituality, contextual ministry and a holistic social gospel. They must open wide their doors and hearts with the radical message of God's mercy and grace for all people as they participate with culture in truth, goodness and beauty; finally, churches must demonstrate the character of Christ as they live among the unchurched—equally balancing biblical formation and discipleship with apostolicity and mission.

The research for this study has not simply been informative—transformative changes have already taken place in me and my ministry. First, the radical commitment of our Triune God, of the Apostle Paul and Patrick, of those in the Movement and the Local Church have strengthened my commitment to living and leading apostolically. As a result, I have a resolute

²⁶⁸ A condensed translation of a more elaborate quote by Albert Einstein in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, Volumes 1-4*, 1969. P. 124. His original quote reads: "The world that we have made as a result of the level of thinking we have done thus far creates problems that we cannot solve at the same level as the level we created them."

intolerance for certain tasks (administrative, clerical, pastoral, etc.) which keep me from being able to exercise missional gifts and passions—I am delegating more, taking on less and willing to let ideas, events and programs simply not happen or exist imperfectly. My heart is drawn elsewhere. When looking through this lens—at the Doctor of Ministry program and the dissertation—I have not shaped the research; it has shaped me.

Second, I am relating with staff, leaders and laity with the expectation that every person and ministry within The River (children, youth, university students, 20something ministry, small groups, discipleship, etc.) will be involved in mission and ministry outside of church circles—rather than simply be aware of the need for it.

Third, I am casting vision about a future that is unapologetic about risks and threats related to mission. The values of safety, comfort and convenience (which many in leadership find essential for decision-making) are a luxury of the past and largely absent in the ministries of Paul, Patrick and our Lord. I believe the Lord will call The River to make several strategic but faith-based decisions (similar to the Local Church sample); we will do so with robust apostolic beliefs and practices and an equally strong emphasis upon worship and biblical discipleship.

In closing, my focus has undoubtedly changed from a reliance upon the managing of people and tasks to a dependence upon the Spirit—who breathes fresh ‘missional air’ into the lungs of what is old, dead and unimaginative.²⁶⁹ Charting our way beyond social and cultural divides will be done by casting a vision so compelling, others will long for it and work towards it in our absence: “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood, assign them tasks and work but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ As in Ezekiel 37, where the Spirit breathed new life back into dead bones.

²⁷⁰ A modern paraphrase of a quote attributed to Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944).

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