

**AN EXAMINATION OF
THE MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY
OF THE 'EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT'**

BY

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement and its relationship to Evangelicalism. The rise of post-Christendom, post-modernism and the increasing marginalisation of the church in Western Culture has created a situation where it needs to ask the basic missiological questions of its own identity and structures. In contrast to many within traditional Evangelicalism, the Emerging Church Movement views these changes as a positive development and, in a social context much more akin to that of the early church, an opportunity to rediscover the essential nature of its calling as Church.

It is in a narrative reading of Scripture and understanding of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God that the ECM believes the answers are to be found. As a result, the ECM finds itself working through a gradual process of dismantling and reconstructing the faith of their Evangelical heritage as they reflect on the meaning of the gospel as they see it expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and His interpretation of the Old Testament narrative.

For the ECM, the gospel is much bigger than merely personal salvation and is best understood as God's great and gracious mission in the world of making new all that has been corrupted by sin and evil. Missional churches realise that they have been invited to participate with God in his redemptive mission and formulate their identity, structures and values accordingly. The ECM engages in intentional, subversive ministry from its new place at the margins of society flowing from the realisation that

mission is not an activity to be carried out by members of the church in certain contexts, but rather the essential character and calling of the church community wherever it may exist.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

1. Emerging Church Movement
2. Emergent Village
3. Missional
4. Postmodernism
5. Post-Christendom
6. Incarnational
7. Narrative
8. Kingdom of God
9. Atonement
10. Evangelical
11. Missio Dei
12. Orthodoxy
13. Ecclesiology

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement and its relationship to the Evangelical Church. The rise of post-Christendom, post-modernism and the increasing marginalisation of the church in Western Culture has been a cause of alarm and concern for the Church in general. Statistically, the Church is in decline and many believe that the situation is dire. Gibbs and Bolger (2005:8) suggest that unless the church finds a way to “embody its message and life within postmodern culture ... it will continue to dwindle in numbers throughout the Western world.”

It is in this context that the rise of the Emerging Church Movement has been witnessed. It represents a reaction to the perceived influence of modernism in Western Christianity, and an attempt to reconstruct an authentic Christian expression that is relevant to postmodern/post-Christian culture. For many it is a beacon of hope in dark situation pioneering a way forward into a new expression of church that is culturally relevant, engaged and effective in its witness. For those on the other side of the fence it represents a serious threat to the integrity of the church and the Gospel and is seen as a dangerous on-ramp to the highway of cultural compromise. For a large number, however, it is a source of confusion. While there are many aspects of the movement that invoke a sense of excitement and genuine sympathy, there are others that leave them cautious and unsure.

What cannot be denied, however, is that the Emerging Church movement is growing rapidly in prominence and influence in Western Christianity. Although initially existing primarily in the UK and the USA, emerging churches are to be

found throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and even South Korea. A large part of the reason for this is that its theology is not restricted to the ivory towers of academics and theologians and promulgated primarily in academic theological journals and conferences. Instead, its ideas and practices have been made accessible to the ordinary pastor and congregant through the powerful medium of popular Christian literature and online in the form of blogs and forums. For the ECM, the reconstruction of an authentic Christian expression that is relevant to postmodern/post-Christian culture is a process of engagement that takes place in the context of a community of Christians sharing this same vision and dream.

This study proposes that one of the core characteristics of this reconstruction is the Emerging Church Movement's understanding of the church as a missional community that actively participates in the *Missio Dei*.

1.1. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is:

- To understand and accurately describe the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement in terms of the factors that have most significantly shaped it, namely, a) the current social contexts of post-Christendom and post-modernism, and b) the biblical narrative of the Kingdom of God.

- To consider its missional ecclesiology in comparison with that of Evangelical Christianity, thereby clarifying its points of consistency and departure.
- To be a resource to the Evangelical pastor and congregant for the purposes of better understanding and evaluating the movement with regards to its missional ecclesiology.

1.2. The Necessity for the Study

The necessity for such a study is based on the following factors:

- Many current critiques and evaluations of the Emerging Church Movement focus primarily on its epistemological underpinnings, or on its “external” church practices. Additional consideration and examination of the movement’s core theological formulations is necessary for the development of a healthy understanding and critique of the movement.
- The term “missional” has become a popular buzzword and concept in contemporary Christian literature and conversation, which is in no small measure due to the influence of the Emerging Church Movement. Although the term is used increasingly commonly, it would appear to mean different things to different people who naturally interpret it according to the existing frameworks and understandings of Christianity and Christian mission they have at their disposal. The result is that although people are using the same words, they are in fact talking about different things. Clarity on the

meaning of the term and concept as it is used in the Emerging Church Conversation is needed.

- Many pastors and Christian leaders within the Evangelical tradition share some of the concerns of the Emerging Church Movement with regard to the questions that ministry in a postmodern/post-Christian context raises, but aren't quite sure whether they are able to trust it as a movement that is faithful to the biblical tradition. Clarity on the theological roots of the movement is needed as well as a clear picture of its points of consistency with and departure from traditional Evangelicalism. When this situation is clearly depicted it becomes much easier for pastors within the Evangelical church to evaluate in what areas the Emerging Church provides a helpful critique of their own tradition, as well as those areas they cannot accept.

1.3. The Research Questions to be Asked

The research questions this study will ask are:

What is the missional ecclesiology of the "Emerging Church Movement"?

- What is the Emerging Church Movement?
- What influences have the societal contexts of Post-Christendom and Post-Modernism had on the development of the movement's missional ecclesiology?
- What is the movement's theological basis for its missional ecclesiology?

What are the implications of the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement for the Evangelical Church?

- What points of consistency and departure exist between the two groups?
- How can the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement be of benefit to the broader Evangelical church?
- From an Evangelical perspective, what are the perceived dangers in the Emerging Church Movement's missional ecclesiology?

1.4. The Research Methodology

The research of this study will follow the method of a literature study. There is a growing body of books and articles written on the subject of the Emerging Church Movement, the social contexts of Post-Christendom and Post-Modernism, and the narrative theology of the Kingdom of God, in which the movement finds its theological roots.

The study of the literature will consist of two parts:

- 1) A survey of the literature written from within the movement, as well as the literature that has significantly shaped the movement, in an attempt to understand and accurately describe the missional ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement, from the Emerging Church's perspective. In this regard, the following sources have provided the backbone for this study: *Emerging Churches: creating Christian communities in postmodern cultures* by Gibbs & Bolger; numerous articles from *Missional Church: a vision for the sending of the Church in North America* edited by Guder; *The*

storyline of the Bible by Bartholomew and Goheen; *The Evangelical Left* by Erickson; *The shaping of things to come: innovation and mission for the 21st-century Church* by Frost and Hirsch; *'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you': J.E. Leslie Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology* by Goheen; *Revisioning evangelical theology: a fresh agenda for the 21st century* by Grenz; *The Emerging Church: vintage Christianity for new generations* by Kimball; *The Manilla Manifesto* and various other documents by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization; *What is the Emerging Church?* by McKnight; *The Scandal of the Cross* by Green and Baker; *The secret message of Jesus* and *A Generous Orthodoxy* by McLaren; *The Church between Gospel and culture* edited by Hunsberger and Van Gelder; and, *Simply Christian* and *Jesus and the Victory of God* by Wright.

- 2) A comparative analysis of the Emerging Church Movement and the Evangelical Church's understandings and models of mission and cultural engagement.

Due to the nature of the movement, an in-depth examination of its theological perspectives cannot be conducted purely on the basis of writings emerging directly from the movement itself. The reason is simple. The missional ecclesiology that the Emerging church is trying to work out and develop in practice is often rooted in theological study 1) that preceded the movement, and 2) has been undertaken by contemporary scholars that, while certainly sympathetic to the movement, don't directly identify themselves as part of the movement. For this reason, when dealing with the deeper theological motivations of the movement, it is necessary to engage fairly extensively with the writings of the scholars most influential in ECM

thought.

In developing this study, the authority, the inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Bible is assumed.

Due to the nature of the topic and problem, no empirical research is deemed to be necessary.

1.5. The Structural Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 will describe the historical development, concerns and forms of the Emerging Church Movement, as it currently exists.

Chapter 3 will describe the social contexts of Post-Modernism and Post-Christendom as perceived by the Emerging Church Movement and the literature they draw on. It will describe the movement's call for a renewed missional stance towards society as opposed to the attractional stance typical of the institutional church of Christendom.

Chapter 4 will move into a description of the movement's claim that the form of such a missional stance needs to be rooted in a renewed understanding of the nature and mission of the Church. It will consider the position that the mission is shaped by the Kingdom of God, and formed in the context of the narrative of Scripture. It will observed how, in this light, the Emerging Church Movement develops its understanding of the nature of the atonement, the kingdom, the

relationship of the church and the kingdom, as well as the practical implications thereof for its practices and structures.

Chapter 5 will consider the relationship of the Emerging Church Movement to Evangelical Christianity. It will provide a basic description of Evangelical Christianity focusing on its historical development, core identity and theology as well as the rise of post-conservative theology. Thereafter a comparative analysis of historical Evangelicalism and the ECM, reflecting the points of consistency and disagreement with the model of missional ecclesiology as portrayed in the study thus far, will be conducted.

In Chapter 6, concluding observations and comments will be made.

Chapter 7 consists of the reference list for this study.

CHAPTER 2

THE EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT – A BASIC PORTRAIT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an initial basic portrait of the Emerging Church Movement (hereafter referred to as the ECM). Although the aspects discussed in this chapter are not the primary concern of this study, they are necessary as a foundation upon which deeper study of the movement's missional ecclesiology can be built. It will provide a basic working definition of the movement, taking into consideration its liminal¹ and nebulous² nature, central concerns, historical development and current forms.

2.1. The Emerging Nature of the ECM

The ECM is not easily defined. One reason the lack of a clear definition arises is because of the movement's unconventional structures. Carson (2005:2) highlights the lack of "Emerging Church" denominations or confessional statements, as well as the absence of an elected body of leaders or any kind of structural authority. He suggests that although the term 'emerging' seems to have gained unanimous acceptance by both those within and without the movement as a sufficient label of self-identification, the reality is that the movement is broad, existing across denominational, traditional and geographic lines, with ill-defined boundaries and without a clearly defined shape or form.

¹ "of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition : in-between, transitional" (Miriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2009).

² "indistinct, vague" (ibid.).

A second reason the lack of a clear definition arises is because of the liminal nature of the movement. Gibbs & Bolger (2005:28-29) identify this as the reason that that emerging church leaders themselves struggle when asked to define the movement – the realisation that this movement is still undergoing transition as it finds itself in the initial stages of its development. For this reason, most descriptions of the movement at this stage, coming from the voices within the movement, focus primarily on what they feel they are emerging from (in reference to various church traditions as well as the broader culture) rather than looking forward to what they are emerging into. Gibbs and Bolger (ibid.) are convinced, however, that although this ‘post’ phase is necessary for the time being, as old ways and structures are dismantled and re-evaluated en route to building something truly viable for postmodern culture, this is not the final destination of the emerging journey.

Any attempt, therefore, to define the ECM comprehensively at this stage needs to show cognisance of the fact that the ECM is still emerging, thereby making it difficult to articulate a comprehensive definition.

2.2. A Concerned Conversation

In this light then, the emphasis placed by those within the ECM on the essence or nature of the movement as a conversation makes perfect sense. Scott McKnight (2006:3-4), in his address on the topic “What is the Emerging Church?” at the 2006 Westminster Theological Seminary Fall Contemporary Issues Conference, emphasises that the ECM is something of a different animal in Christian circles

because it is not defined according to the theological categories we are used to. In fact, his point is actually that the ECM is not defined by its theology and that to force it into such a definition is to misunderstand and misrepresent it. McKnight states (ibid.):

By saying that the emerging movement is not a ‘theological’ movement, I have something specific in mind. The EM is not known by its innovative doctrinal statement or by its confessional stances. Now, to be sure, every movement is ‘theological’ in one way or another, and that means the EM is a theological movement. But, what we need to keep in mind is that it is not a ‘Reformed’ movement with a new twist, or an Anabaptist movement with new leaders ...

It is for this reason that we cannot accurately speak of the emerging “church” because the reality is that there is no such thing. It needs to be understood and interpreted for what it is - a movement or a conversation.³ McKnight (ibid.) clarifies what he means by this:

The leaders are determined, right now, to prevent it becoming anything more than a loose association of those who want to explore conversation about the Christian faith and the Christian mission and the Christian praxis in this world of ours, and they want to explore that conversation with freedom and impunity when it comes to doctrine.

Those making up the voices of the ‘emerging conversation’ share a common concern and burden for Christian faith, mission and praxis in the postmodern world and find their unity in their commitment to authentic dialogue with one another and others on these issues as they practice an ongoing re-examination of theology preferring to understand the nature of faith as a journey rather than a destination.

³ ‘Conversation’ is the favoured term of some of the leading voices in the discussion, e.g. Brian McLaren and Tony Jones (McKnight 2006:3). On a practical level, the movement literally does exist as a conversation with most of the interaction taking place in open forum blogs and websites thus making it easily accessible for anyone to engage the conversation. It should be noted too, in this regard, that much of the ECM content exists online rather than in traditional print.

Although it is necessary to affirm again that attempts to define the ECM at this stage needs to show cognisance of the still emerging nature of the ECM, it is the essence of the conversation - this shared common concern and burden for Christian faith, mission and praxis in the postmodern/post-Christian world - that gives the researcher something of substance to work with even now. Although the nebulous nature of the movement makes generalisations unavoidable to a certain extent, there is certainly enough common ground and shared values within the movement to allow for an articulation that fairly represents the whole without violating the integrity of its parts.⁴

2.3. A Basic Definition

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:44), after extensive research and study,⁵ offer just such a definition of emerging churches. For them, emerging churches are essentially “communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures”. Kimball (2006), an important voice in the conversation, provides a similar understanding of the term “emerging church”. He states that emerging churches are:

... churches who were focusing on the mission of Jesus and thinking about the Kingdom in our emerging culture. It meant churches who were rethinking what it means to be the church in our emerging culture. It meant churches who were ‘being the church’ instead of ‘going to church’ in our emerging culture.

⁴ That we are in a position to be able to identify these shared values is not due to the presence of any official document from within the ECM stating them as such, but rather due to the growing amount of academic research into the movement that has only begun to happen in earnest in recent years. Indicative of this is the fact that the first real published examinations and critiques of the ECM from notable academics and theologians only came in 2005 in the form of D.A. Carson’s *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, and Gibbs’ & Bolger’s *Emerging Churches*, which is currently widely regarded by many leading voices within the Emerging Conversation as the best available overview and scholarly analysis of the movement.

⁵ The research for this book took place between 2000 and 2005, the bulk of it consisting of personal interviews with 50 of the Emerging Church Leaders currently playing a significant role in its development in the US and UK.

These definitions point to the heart of what is increasingly becoming the prevailing perspective of those making up the conversation regarding these issues of faith, mission and praxis, and highlights what would seem to be two of the movements most central concerns: 1) the Western context of post-Christendom/postmodern/emerging culture; and 2) an authentic practicing of the way of Jesus and the Kingdom in community, also spoken of in terms of the missional nature of the church.

However, before these two issues are developed in greater detail, there is one further aspect regarding the make-up of the ECM that needs to be clarified for the sake of avoiding unnecessary confusion later in the paper – that is the distinction between the terms “Emerging” and “Emergent” as they are used in reference to this movement.

2.4. A Distinction in terms: “Emerging” and “Emergent”

This has been a common point of confusion for many interacting with the movement. Scott McKnight (2006:4), in his address on the topic “What is the emerging church?” at the Westminster Theological Seminary Fall Contemporary Issues Conference (October 2006), emphasises the necessity of a proper understanding of how these two terms relate to each other. His concern is that the term “emergent” is correctly used as a reference to Emergent Village (hereafter referred to as EV), and the term “emerging” when referring to the broader Emerging Church Movement (ECM).

Kimball (www.dankimball.com) suggests that the ECM, broadly defined, refers to the movement seeking to rethink Christian faith and practice in the context of emerging culture in the West. It is loosely bound and has no official organisational/institutional structures. EV, on the other hand does exist as an official organisation. They have a National Coordinator,⁶ a board of directors,⁷ and an official website.⁸ Both terms have their roots in the Young Leader's Network. EV was the result of the formulation of a new theological working group/network by Tony Jones, Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt in June 2001 in response to the void left after the disbanding of a similar theological working group that had been formed by Leadership network as part of their Young Leaders Network. From about 1997, however, the term "emerging church" was already used by the Young Leader's Network in its interaction with emerging culture and generation and soon came to be used to describe the broader movement as it exists today, thus the confusion of terms. Kimball (ibid.) states:

Through time people started even saying 'Emergent Church' instead of 'Emerging Church' or use both terms as describing the same thing - instead of having Emergents focus more on theology and Emerging Church more on methodology as it started initially.

EV needs to be understood as a narrower conversation or one stream existing within the broader ECM, focusing primarily on theological and philosophical discussion and reformulation, and having particular reference to those that have formally aligned themselves with this grouping. Therefore while there exists a very definite distinction between the two, they are still closely related. Kunkle (2006:4)

⁶ Tony Jones (<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/board-of-directors>).

⁷ Brian D. McLaren, Joseph R. Myers, Ivy Beckwith, Diana Butler Bass, Rodolpho Carrasco, Tim Keel, Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Mark Oestreicher, Chris Seay, Karen Ward, David Robertson (<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/board-of-directors>).

⁸ <http://www.emergentvillage.com> and <http://www.emergentvillage.org>

helps us understand the nature of the relationship with his statement that “While EV is not the same as the ECM, it certainly impacts the ECM and has played an important role in directing its theological conversation”.

2.5. ECM Categories and Forms

Ed Stetzer (www.baptistpress.org) provides a helpful breakdown of the ECM into three basic categories that illustrates more clearly in what way EV exists as a narrower conversation within the broader ECM conversation. He describes these groups as 1) the Relevants, 2) the Reconstructionists, and 3) the Revisionists.

The Relevants are for the most part theologically conservative evangelicals. Their primary focus is not on the reshaping of theology but rather they desire to see the church become more relevant to contemporary society and therefore focus on contextualising things like worship and preaching styles in an attempt to better connect with postmodern-minded people (ibid.).

The Reconstructionists are also for the most part theologically conservative, but take greater issue with the form of church, and not just its aesthetic elements that need to be contextualised. Their criticism of current church forms is based on the challenges presented by the de-Christianising of society and what they perceive as the failure of current church forms to create/facilitate true life transformation. It is within this group that emphasis is placed on more informal, incarnational and organic church forms, e.g. house churches (ibid).

It is in the Revisionist camp that EV is most suitably categorised. They generally exhibit a more theologically liberal stance and question key evangelical doctrines, “critiquing their appropriateness for the emerging postmodern world” (ibid).

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:30) differ slightly with Stetzer in his appraisal in that they don’t classify the types of churches under Stetzer’s ‘Relevants’ category as being truly emerging. Gibb’s and Bolger (ibid.) still see these as generational ministry churches, because although their methods and practices are more culturally relevant, in essence their church practice and paradigm “remained the same as their conservative Baptist, seeker, new paradigm, purpose-drive predecessors; only the surface techniques changed.” For the purposes of this paper, then, which is more focused on the theological rather than practical aspect of the ECM’s missional ecclesiology, references to the ECM will exclude those falling under Stetzer’s “Relevants” category unless otherwise stated.

2.6. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to set forth a preliminary portrait of the ECM as a foundation for understanding the movement and upon which deeper study of its missional ecclesiology can be built.

It was shown that the ECM is still emerging and exists in a state of liminality. The ECM is referred to in terms of a conversation or movement. It does not exist in an institutional form. It is not a denomination or new church group. Rather it is a network of churches from various denominational backgrounds and traditions who

share a common concern and burden for ministering as true servants of Christ and His kingdom, according to the pattern He modelled, and in a culturally relevant and engaging way within emerging culture.

Although there is a shared concern for and commitment to this cause, it is necessary to keep in view that great diversity exists within the group. It is here that we need to keep in focus the distinction between 'emerging' and 'emergent' and the different forms that churches take in different segments of the conversation.

This study seeks to represent a missional ecclesiology that is a fair reflection of the movement as a whole (emerging and emergent churches). This issue in particular displays a lot of overlap between the two groups with much of the theological reflection taking place in the EV camp having a significant influence on the development and practice of the broader ECM.

This chapter lays the foundation for the next two chapters of this study, which, in turn, will seek to further develop and expound Gibbs & Bolger's (2005:44) definition of emerging churches as "communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures." Chapter 3 will develop with a focus on the Western context of post-Christendom/postmodern/emerging culture. Chapter 4 will concern itself with the aspect of an authentic practicing of the way of Jesus and the Kingdom in community, i.e. the missional nature of the church.

CHAPTER 3

THE ECM AND EMERGING CULTURE

Introduction

Having established a basic definition of the ECM, the purpose of this chapter is to further explore the concept of emerging culture and the impact it has had on the formation of the ECM. It will identify the reality of a changing society (Christendom to Post-Christendom) and a changing worldview (modernism to postmodernism) as the context in which Christian ministry and mission now increasingly takes place, the implications thereof as well as the ECM's response.

3.1. A New Context for Mission: The Rise of Emerging Culture

Gibbs & Bolger (2005:17-18) observe that Western society at present finds itself in interesting times. Since the 1950's, it has witnessed, and continues to witness, two significant cultural shifts that have had a profound effect on the entirety of Western society, and most certainly the Western Church. The first is the transition from Christendom to post-Christendom, and the second is the transition from modernity to postmodernity.

3.1.1. A Changing Society: Post-Christendom

Alan Roxburgh (1997:7-8) provides a helpful metaphor in his description of the fourth and twentieth centuries as bookends that mark significant transition points in the history of the church - the rise and collapse of Christendom in Western society.

Todd (1977:130) identifies Constantine's conversion to Christianity in AD 312⁹ as the first point in Christendom's development. This new situation would soon bring about the establishment of Christianity (a persecuted minority faith up until this time) as the favoured and, by the end of the century, the official religion of the Roman Empire. Frost & Hirsch (2003:8) suggest that this would in effect succeed in laying the foundation for the formalisation of an institutional interdependence between the pope and the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire (today's Western Europe) by the start of the Middle Ages.

Guder (1998:6) highlights the significance of this partnership in his description of Christendom as: "the system of church-state partnership and cultural hegemony in which the Christian religion was the protected and privileged religion of society and the church its legally established institutional form". This partnership would prove to leave a lasting legacy on European social behaviour and religious patterning, with Christendom, in its prime, emerging as a metanarrative that would define church and culture for an entire age.

Proponents of the ECM, drawing heavily on the writings of missiologists like Leslie Newbigin and David Bosch, lament the effect of this historical development on the Church's understanding of its own nature and its consequent stance towards society. In order to understand their concerns, it is helpful to consider, in a very basic sense, by way of comparison, the self-understanding and stance towards society of the pre-Christendom and Christendom churches. Kreider (2003:166) provides a helpful table for plotting some of these developments.

⁹ There would appear to be some discrepancy over this date. AD 313 is also frequently cited as the year of Constantine's conversion.

THE CHRISTENDOM PARADIGM SHIFT: MISSION

	PRE-CHRISTENDOM	CHRISTENDOM
VANTAGE POINT	margins; deviant; private	center; mainstream; public
ATTRACTION	free humans; attractive community; spiritual power	access to prestige/jobs/power; participation in society
POWER	spiritual power; human vulnerability	human/institutional power
SANCTIONS	voluntary	compulsory
INCULTURATION	pilgrim and indigenizing principles in tension; resident aliens	indigenizing principle predominates; residents
ROLE OF JESUS	The Good Shepherd – Victor, Lord, healer, teacher for all Christians	Pantokrator – exalted as God; teacher for “perfect” Christians
WORSHIP	unimpressive; equipping Christians to live attractive lives	dramatic liturgy in imposing buildings; impressing non-Christians
MISSIONAL STYLE	mission as the identity of the church; taking the pagan and Jewish options seriously	maintenance as the stance of the church; proscribing the pagan and Jewish options; mission to backsliding believers or to people on the frontiers

Unfortunately, it is not possible within the confines of this paper to interact with each of Kreider’s categories in more detail. There are however, four that are pertinent to understanding the ECM’s response to Christendom:

a. Vantage point: Kreider (2003:166-167) suggests that the Christendom shift saw the movement of Christianity from the margins of society to its centre. Whereas in pre-Christendom, Christianity functioned under the status of *religio illicita*, an illegal superstition that at times resulted in harassment by neighbours or persecution by the imperial authorities, in Christendom, Christians came to take part and in fact occupy central positions in society while at the same time helping to define its norms and values. Vitally, Christians now saw the world, interpreted

the Bible and did theology, not from the margins but from their new vantage point at the centre.

b. Attraction: Kreider (2003:167) also maintains that the nature of Christianity's attractiveness to the outside was deeply affected by the Christendom shift. Whereas in pre-Christendom, non-Christians were attracted by the distinctive way of life exhibited by the Christian community¹⁰ and conviction by its message despite the imposing disincentives imposed by the wider society,¹¹ suddenly, under Christendom these disincentives to conversion were replaced by numerous societal incentives, and even force.

c. Inculturation: Kreider (2003:170) laments the loss of the Church's capacity to make a distinctive contribution to society as a result of its domestication within society. In pre-Christendom, particularly the first and second centuries, Christians described themselves as "resident aliens" (*paroikoi*), as a description of their awareness that wherever they lived they were at home, but not fully at home. However, the rise of Christendom saw Christian leaders increasingly smoothing off the angularities of the Christian tradition – enabling Christianity to fit neatly into its host society which was suddenly seeing many of its influential and powerful elite class citizens present themselves for baptism. Indicative of this shift is the example of fourth-century teaching for baptismal candidates, which concentrated

¹⁰ Kreider (2003:167) gives the following examples: "Origen stated, 'The churches of God which have been taught by Christ, when compared with the assemblies of the people where they live, are 'as lights in the world.'" (*Contra Celsum*, 3.29). Justin reported that people's hesitations were overcome "by observing the consistent lives of their neighbors, or noting the strange patience of their injured acquaintances, or experiencing the way they did business with them" (Justin, 1 *Apol* 16)."

¹¹ "Christians encountered harassment and ostracism from their non-Christian neighbors; at times they faced execution" (ibid.).

now on how to avoid the errors of heresy as opposed to a focus on how to live the teachings of Jesus, which was a major focus in pre-Christendom baptismal catechesis. Christianity, in its new role, needed to accommodate the values of the elite – traditional Roman values, – which dominated public life. The natural consequence, in terms of the church’s understanding of itself and its stance towards society, was its increasing transition from resident aliens (*paroikoi*) to “residents” (*parochiani*).

d. Missional style: Kreider (2003:174-175) highlights the general shift in focus from mission to maintenance that accompanied the establishment of Christendom. Whereas in pre-Christendom, mission was central to the identity of the church, under the Christendom model, which would render mission unnecessary, the church would cease to find its identity and shape in mission. Mission would rather become one of the arms or activities of the church focusing on the frontiers of the Christian world and, as Shenk (1999:74) states, would be regarded as “efforts outside historic Christendom to establish the church”.

The social phenomena of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the emergence of modernity would spell the beginning of the end for Christendom and, with its, as Newbigin (1986:18) puts it, “separation between fact and value” and “division between the private world and the public,” a revising of the church’s role in this new world of science and reason. Newbigin (1986:19) argues that the response of the Christian churches (particularly the Protestant churches) to the challenge of the Enlightenment was “to accept the dichotomy and withdraw into the private sector”.

Even though, taken as a socio-political reality, the modern period has witnessed Christendom in serious decline, partially as a result of the emergence of the dichotomies described by Newbiggin above, Guder (1998:6) describes the continuance of a “functional Christendom” during this time that continued the Christendom legacy as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes, and social structures even when the legal structures of Christendom had been removed. In this new modern world, the church still had an important role to play, however, as Goheen (1999:18-19) explains, it had been greatly reduced and existed as something of a chaplain to society with the function of caring for the religious needs of its members and having a positive influence on morality. Gibbs and Bolger (2005:17) observe that as the modern project continued to develop, the Church began to increasingly occupy a place on the margins of society alongside other recreational and non-profit organisations.

It is the end of modernity that Roxburgh (1997:7-8) describes as the second bookend that marks a significant transition point in the history of the church – the collapse of Christendom in Western society. In the fourth century, history witnessed the adoption of Christianity by Constantine and the church’s attempts to understand and express its nature and role as the new centre of the culture. The twentieth century witnessed the turning of the tables and saw Christians challenged to understand the meaning of their new social location in a decentred and pluralistic world.

3.1.2. A Changing Worldview: Post-modernism

For the last three to four hundred years the cultural underpinning and prevailing worldview has been that of modernity. The last forty to fifty years¹² (approximately) however, has seen this worldview challenged by philosophers who suggest that Western society has now entered a postmodern stage, even though they have been unable to agree on a final description or definition thereof. Robinson (2006:11) explains that the debate still continues as to whether postmodernity “forms the basis of a new worldview or whether it is merely a critique of modernity, clearing the ground for a worldview that has yet to emerge”. Van Gelder (1996:113) suggests that even though debate over the definition and nature of postmodernism continues, it must be accepted that “the cultural landscape we occupy in the West in the latter part of the twentieth century has fundamentally shifted”.

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:32) report that consistent with this diagnosis, ECM leaders emphasise that the shifts and challenges the Western Church is experiencing at the moment are not just generational in scope (e.g. Gen X to Gen Y, etc.) merely requiring new techniques and ministry approaches in order to be effective and relevant, but are taking place at a much deeper and more fundamental level.¹³ In a series of three conferences put on by the Young Leader’s

¹² *The last forty to fifty years* is not a reference to the origins of postmodern theory, the development of which can already be traced from the earliest part of the 20th century, but rather to the student revolution of the 1960’s and especially the Paris riots in 1968, which most postmodern theorists identify as the key transition point (Van Gelder 1996:127).

¹³ “Church leaders often reduce the postmodern shift to that of a generation gap. To be fair, there is benefit to generational theory, even though it tends to oversimplify complex issues ... Generational issues are imbedded in the much deeper cultural and philosophical shift from modernity to postmodernity” (Gibbs & Bolger 2005:21-22).

Network in 1997 and 1998, there was a noticeable shift in focus from generational ministries to the issue of postmodernism. The third conference concluded with the consensus that “the evangelistic challenge for the church was not generational angst but a philosophical disconnect with the wider culture” (ibid.).¹⁴

Postmodernism can only be understood against the backdrop from which it is emerging – modernism, which was born at the start of the Enlightenment and had its roots in the Renaissance. According to Grenz (1996:2-4), Enlightenment thinking and its counterpart, modernism, elevated the individual person to the centre of the world as a rational and autonomous being. It worked off of the epistemological assumptions that knowledge is objective and certain and is accessible to human understanding. From this perspective the universe is understood to be mechanistic in its form and function and it is believed that by evaluating and studying observable reality through the filters of reason and science, its deeper secrets can be discovered and used for the benefit of humanity and the realisation of the hope of a better world.

Although the Enlightenment project began to come under attack as early as the late nineteenth century through the writings of people like Friedrich Nietzsche, according to Ayelsworth (2005), it was Jean-Francois Lyotard who first used the term ‘postmodern’ with regards to cultural analysis and philosophy in his 1979

¹⁴ The development of the YLN has had a significant influence on the rise and development of the Emerging conversation. “For the next three years, postmodernity continued to be a main topic for the Young Leaders Network, which morphed into the Terra Nova Theological Project and which later became Emergent” (Gibbs & Bolger 2005:32). Interestingly the third YLN conference in 1998 also marked Brian McLaren’s first involvement with the group (ibid.).

publication, *a Condition Postmoderne*. It was in this text that Lyotard (1984:24)¹⁵ defined postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”

Grenz (1996:5) suggests that this new philosophical and sociological paradigm found its impetus in the rise of deconstruction as a literary theory. Lawlor (2006) identifies Jacques Derrida as the father of deconstruction as he first introduced the term into philosophical literature from 1967 with the simultaneous publication of three texts – *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference* and *Speech and Phenomena*.

An attempt to define the term ‘deconstruction’ is certainly ironic in that one of the concept’s basic assumptions is that texts and traditions, in and of themselves, are not univocal and are instead understood to be imbued with multiple meanings. Michener (2007:64-65) suggests that deconstruction “analyzes a text so thoroughly as to discover the many ways a text did not communicate upon initial reading ... In essence it claims that we cannot claim to have grasped ultimate reality as it really is.”

For Grenz (1996:5), deconstruction rejects logocentrism and aims to expose the assumptions and biases readers bring to a text thereby making it possible to foster an ongoing reading of the text in community that keeps the dialogue open without settling the issues. Because the meaning of a text is dependent on the perspective of the reader, the possible meanings of a text is limited only by the number of readers. For Caputo (1997:159), it is these factors that make him regard

¹⁵ English Edition: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984

deconstruction as a blessing for religion because it keeps religion “open to constant reinvention” and encourages it to “reread ancient texts in new ways” and to “reinvent ancient traditions in new contexts.”

Peters and Ghiraldelli (2002:4) identify the significant influence that Derrida’s work would have on that of Richard Rorty - another significant contributor to the development of postmodern thought. Rorty’s thought represents a thorough rejection of Foundationalism in all its forms – linguistic, moral and epistemological. Best and Kellner (2002:102) state, “For Rorty, language is a poetic construction that creates worlds, not a mirror that reflects ‘reality’ ... Language can only provide us with a ‘description’ of the world that is thoroughly historical and contingent in nature.” As such, for Rorty, the value of ideas is not based on their truthfulness, which is unknowable, but on their usefulness in their particular social context – a postmodern pragmatism.

Although there are definite distinctions in the work of Derrida and Rorty, Kuipers (1997:109) highlights their unified contribution in exposing the impact of culture, history and language on one’s perception and interpretation of reality and the impossibility of neutrality in our assessment thereof as a result of the limits within which human thought takes place. These assumptions are central in postmodern thought.

Sire (2004:223) provides a helpful analysis of the developments in Western thought in his description of the postmodern shift as a movement from “(1) the Christian ‘premodern’ notion of a revealed determinative metanarrative to (2) the ‘modern’

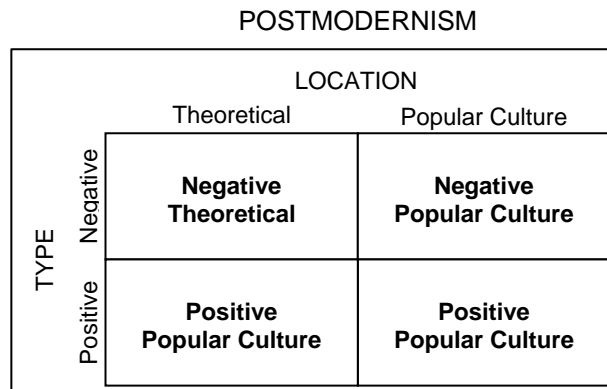
notion of the autonomy of human reason with access to truth of correspondence to (3) the 'postmodern' notion that we create truth as we construct languages that serve our purposes, though these very languages deconstruct upon analysis."

David Bosch (1991:352) offers a similar comparison between postmodernity and modernity. Whereas modernity is an understanding of the world through autonomous human rationality, the postmodern paradigm pokes holes in such an assumption by its recognition that "language cannot be absolutely accurate" and "that it is impossible finally to 'define' either scientific laws or theological truths". It is neither irrationality nor anti-rationality, but rather, as Bosch refers to it, an "extended rationality" that takes cognisance of the value of experience in determining meaning.

McKnight (2006:11) identifies the awareness of the impossibility of purely objective analysis of our assumptions and the resultant impossibility of being able to prove them by rational, foundationalist and objective methods as the reason for the current collapse of metanarratives. If every person and localised community's individual stories are products of the time and culture in which they are embedded, they are in effect all equally valid or invalid, eliminating the possibility for any one person or community to be in possession of the true overarching metanarrative for all.

In practical terms, according to Van Gelder (2000:35-36), the unfolding of this shift has seen two forms of postmodernism emerge, one that is negative (hard) and

one that is positive (soft),¹⁶ both given expression in two different locations: theoretical critique and popular culture, as he illustrates in the diagram included below and as described in the consequent paragraphs. .



1) Negative, theoretical postmodernism, represented by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jean Francois Lyotard. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, criticise the Enlightenment project for its faulty foundations and identify a world characterised by relativism, understanding social constructions of meaning to be arbitrary at best (ibid.).

2) Negative, popular-culture postmodernism is reflected in the nihilistic scepticism that categorises much of current youth culture, easily seen in much of their music and other social phenomena such as the increase in teen-age suicides and exploding drug culture (ibid.).

¹⁶ It is with this second, positive/soft type of postmodernism that the proponents of the ECM find some kind of affinity, albeit in varying degrees.

3) Positive, theoretical postmodernism, represented by theorists such as Steven Best and Douglas Kellner also reject “the totalizing of modernity’s assumptions of objectivity and universal truth” and propose instead “the development of a ‘social critical theory’ that takes seriously the idea that we can know the world around us.” They affirm that “[T]here is a reality that can be known, even though our knowledge is rooted in a particular perspective and represents an interpretation of reality” (ibid).

4) Positive, popular-cultural postmodernism tries to find meaning in life by emphasising and valuing the diversity and collage of life, appreciating its irony, and in doing so “defying the existence of preconceived ‘conventional’ codes” (ibid.).

3.2. Implications of Emerging Culture for a Model of Missions

3.2.1. A New Culture Means a New Church

Although social commentators and philosophers would agree with Van Gelder (1996:113) that “the cultural landscape we occupy in the West in the latter part of the twentieth century has fundamentally shifted”, there would seem to be a general consensus that it is still shifting, and as such we need to understand that at present the Western world is living between paradigms. Modernity, although seriously waning, has not faded from the scene and finds itself co-existing with an unsettled postmodernity that continues to undergo a process of transition and change. It is on this basis that we can speak of a society living between

paradigms. The old paradigm is dying but the new paradigm has not yet fully arrived.

Robinson (2006:12-13) observes that this is not the first time that the church has found itself living between paradigms. He mentions two examples: first, that of the church of the late Roman Empire during the period AD 500-600 that was suddenly faced with the invasion of predominantly pagan peoples and the dramatic effects this had on the economic, social, political and cultural landscape of that society; and second, the church during the period of the Reformation during the 16th and 17th centuries. For Robinson (*ibid.*), the point that needs to be considered is the fact that in both cases, where significant societal changes were evident, the church that emerged from these situations looked significantly different to the church that had existed during the preceding period.

Hearing the voices from within the Emerging conversation, it would appear that there exists a strong sentiment that the church finds itself in a similar position once again. Carson (2005:12), in his critique of the ECM comments that, “At the heart of the ‘movement’ ... lies the conviction that changes in the culture signal that a new church is ‘emerging’” and that “Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging church.”

Leonard Sweet (2001:18-21) outlines four possible responses of the church to the rise of emerging culture. He says churches can either 1) Deny its reality or significance; 2) Accept its existence but choose to “hunker-in-the-bunker” in something of a survivalist approach that dreams about the past and demeans the

future; or 3) Not try and escape from it but rather “learn its language, master its media, and engage it on a higher level.”

The ECM believes that it is necessary to dismantle modern/Christendom ideas of church as well as church practices that are not viable for postmodern/post-Christendom culture, and are not demanded by the gospel (Gibbs & Bolger 2005:29). Guder (1998:5-6) states that: “Neither the structures nor the theology of our established Western traditional churches is missional. They are shaped by the legacy of Christendom. That is, they have been formed by centuries in which Western civilization considered itself formally and officially Christian” (1998:5-6).

3.2.2. The Re-emergence of the West as a “Missionary” Field

The re-emergence of the West as a “missionary field” has given rise to the need for the Church to re-engage with the basic missiological questions as it is forced to rethink its fundamental identity and revision its ministry for such a context, that it might, in time, successfully embody and communicate the gospel within postmodern culture (Carson 2005:48-49, Gibbs & Bolger 2005:16-17, Van Gelder 1996b:26-28). According to Frost & Hirsch (2003:7) the question is “What has God called us to be and do in our current cultural context?”

3.2.3. The Need for an Embodiment of the Gospel that is Relevant to the Postmodern Ethos

In his appraisal of postmodern thought and culture, Grenz (1996:167-174) comes to the conclusion that a new embodiment of the Gospel is necessary if it is to be effective and relevant in postmodern culture. Grenz, (1996:161-162) identifies the birth and maturation of Evangelicalism in the modern era. As such, it is logical that it should exhibit strong ties with its host. Evangelicals are modern thinkers and as such have used the tools of modernity to good effect in their Gospel task. As messengers of the Gospel in a world that glorifies reason and science, a rational apologetic that is able to prove its claims by appealing to reason, science and history, together with a logical presentation of the propositional content of Scripture has been vital.

In a world where a very different intellectual ethos has taken root, one has to seriously question the adequacy of these tools for the future ministry and effectiveness of the Church in a postmodern world. Grenz (1996:167-174) suggests that a postmodern Gospel needs to exhibit different characteristics. From his perspective it needs to be:

1) Post-individualistic. Whereas modernity glorified the importance of the individual postmodernity does not perceive individuals in isolation from one another but as part of a tradition, a heritage, a community A postmodern Gospel, while continuing to value the individual, understands the purpose of God in a much more communal sense, believing that the community of the Church is a) the

primary instrument by which God is working in the world, and b) essential for growth in the process of “knowing” God (ibid.).

2) Post-rationalistic. God and the Gospel are bigger than the propositional truths people use to describe them. Knowledge is not purely objective but exists in a dynamic relationship in which human concepts help to understand one’s experiences, while at the same time one’s encounters shape the interpretation of these concepts. While the value of reason and logic are still maintained, it is recognised that knowledge also arises from sources beyond the cognitive level and that it is therefore necessary to embrace the value of personal experience and the notion of mystery (ibid.).

3) Post-dualistic. Modernity’s dualism between mind and matter is closely related to the modern Church’s dualism between the body and soul, in which salvation is understood primarily in terms that render issues related to the physical dimension of human life as being of secondary importance to those that are spiritual. Saving “souls” was seen as the main task of the Church because the body had no eternal significance, The postmodern ethos, however, prefers to understand life holistically and is interested in the person as a unified whole. The Gospel that the Church offers needs to demonstrate the holistic nature of God’s saving purposes in the world (ibid.).

4) Post-noeticentric. Building on the concept of post-dualism, a postmodern embodiment of the Gospel needs to emphasise and demonstrate the relevance of faith for every aspect of human life. Commitment to Christ is not only about

orthodoxy but orthopraxy. Growth in Biblical Wisdom rather than Biblical Knowledge alone is the goal. The surrounding world must feel the practical effects of the witness of the transformed and still-being-transformed communities of Christ in their midst (ibid.)

The post- statements above reveal an interesting tension that proponents of the ECM readily embrace – a rejection of Enlightenment epistemology held together with an affirmation of the metanarrative. Grenz (1996:164) admits that there is a limit on the extent to which Christians are able to find affinity with postmodern theorists like Derrida who deny the existence of a unifying centre to reality. By virtue of the belief that God has revealed Himself and His purposes for the world throughout human history and primarily in and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all Christians do claim the existence of a single overarching metanarrative into which all the local narratives of the communities of the world do somehow fit. Grenz (1996:163-165), therefore, suggests that a rejection of postmodernism's rejection of the metanarrative is necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the Christian faith.

On the other hand, Grenz (1996:166) along with the other prominent ECM voices, is sympathetic to postmodernism's rejection of Enlightenment epistemology and critique thereof, and finds that it is not only issues of time and culture that impact one's reading and interpretation of texts and renders purely objective knowledge unattainable, but the human sinful condition too. Grenz (1996:170) and his colleagues in the ECM affirm that absolute truth exists in God alone, but realise that His reality transcends the finite limits of human rationality.

3.2.4. The Need to Recover the Church's True Identity

While the ECM is passionate about becoming a church that is relevant and effective in its new context, in many ways there would seem to be a deeper motivation and hope that undergirds it all. Whereas the demise of Christendom, the church's loss of societal importance, the increase of pluralism, and the new "threat" of postmodernism is a cause for alarm and concern for many within the traditional Evangelical church, the ECM takes a rather optimistic stance on the matter, preferring to consider it, as Goheen (2002:38) states, "a positive development because now the church can recover its identity as shaped by the scriptural story rather than the cultural story." In a different article Goheen (1998:19-20) elaborates on the nature of this hope by likening the situation of the Western Church today to that of the Early Church. It too existed as a single voice amongst many voices on the margins of a pluralistic society and without any special social privilege. The belief is that the Western Church's current social context provides it with a unique opportunity to rediscover the same counter-cultural missionary stance that so characterised the First Church

Stetzer (2006:20) observes a growing awareness among Christian leaders that what is required is not just a reworking of the church's programmes, but rather a rediscovery of its mission. It is the church that discovers its identity in its mission, and organises its programmes as effective servants thereof that he describes as "missional." Frost & Hirsch (2003:16) stress the urgency of the situation that the Church, in the current context of this social-historical shift to the postmodern,

rediscovers itself as an apostolic movement, abandoning its role as a static institution.

3.2.5. The Need for a Missional Model of Incarnational Ministry from the Margins

Frost and Hirsch (2003:18-19) identify the attractional paradigm as one of the Christendom Church's fundamental flaws. Their criticism of this stance is not a criticism of being attractive to unbelievers, in terms of way of life, etc., but rather a criticism of a mentality that assumes that if a church is planted in a certain area, and if attention is given to making sure that it is attractive in terms of its programmes and aesthetics, that people will automatically come to meet God and find fellowship with one another. Instead, they suggest, the missional church is fully aware that it holds no place of privilege in its host community, and embraces its "sent-ness" as it desires to see the development of indigenous, contextualised communities of worship functioning as salt and light in their host communities.

Central to this missional model is the concept of incarnational ministry. Brian McLaren (2006b:282-283) quotes Paul's famous dictum of becoming like a Jew to reach a Jew and becoming all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:20-23) as the basis for this concept. In the Gospel, God become human in the incarnation of Jesus Christ to reach humans. Paul takes this to be a model for his own ministry and all Christian ministry. McLaren (ibid.) sets the limits within which incarnational ministry is to be appropriated. Firstly, it is not dishonest and refuses to portray itself to be something it isn't in order to win the confidence of those to

whom it is being presented. Secondly it is not a display of open relative tolerance that blurs all distinctions by being willing to incorporate all the practices and ideas of those to whom it is ministering. Gibbs (2005:86), in agreement with McLaren, suggests that rather than extracting new believers and seekers out of their cultural contexts into the “safety” of the church, incarnational ministry is about appreciating their original cultural contexts and finding ways to infiltrate it and communicate and demonstrate the gospel effectively within it, with the goal of the formation of gospel communities from within the culture that are a true expression of the culture.

The term missional¹⁷ features strongly in the emerging conversation and as a concept has become one of its defining characteristics. Missional is not something that the church does or engages in; its nature is one of mission. Missions is no longer merely an activity carried out by missionaries in foreign lands. Rather, as Barret et al. state (2004:ix-x), “mission is the character of the church in whatever context it exists.” No longer is it a church that does missions, or a church that is mission-minded. Missional implies a church that is on-mission with God (joining God in His mission – *Missio Dei*) in its immediate context. Stetzer (2006:27) writes:

God is a missionary God in this culture and in every culture. His nature does not change with location. Therefore a missionary posture should be the normal expression of the church in all times and places ... Mission is its fundamental identity.

¹⁷ Missional is not a term or concept invented by those in the ECM and in fact comes out of the writings of the “Gospel and our Culture Network” (GOCN), and more specifically their contribution to the work *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, edited by Darryl Guder. The aim of this multi-authored book was to bring the World Council of Churches' discussions of *missio dei* (“the mission of God”) and Lesslie Newbigin's missionary insights to bear on North America, and interact with the opportunity provided to the church by the decline of Christendom to rediscover its identity as a people sent by God into the world as gospel witnesses (Billings 2008:1).

3.3. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the phenomenon of emerging culture as the context in which mission needs to take place. Emerging culture is identified by significant transitions taking place in Western culture and society in terms of the rise of a post-Christendom and a postmodern worldview.

Whereas the church of Christendom enjoyed a position of privilege and influence at the centre of society, the church of post-Christendom reflects a situation strikingly similar to that experienced by the early church - a pluralistic society where the church exists on the margins as one small voice amongst many voices.

Although this transition has not yet fully matured and the reality is that we find ourselves currently in-between paradigms, so to speak, the ECM identifies this as a positive development and as an opportunity to rediscover the essential nature of its calling as Church. It is an opportunity to recover its identity, this time shaped not by the cultural story, but by the scriptural story.

The rise of emerging culture has seen the re-emergence of the West as a legitimate missionary field requiring the church to dedicate itself to fundamental missiological questions and to re-orient its practices and structures accordingly. It is felt that what is needed most is a model of incarnational ministry from the margins to replace the attractional model that so dominated the church of Christendom. It is in this sense that the term 'missional' has come to be used - intentional ministry flowing from the realisation that mission is not an activity to be

carried out by members of the church in certain contexts, but rather the essential character and calling of the church community wherever it may exist.

If what is required is for the Church to embrace it's missional calling and identity, it is necessary to ask a preliminary question – What is the mission? What is God's mission and how is the church to join God therein? It is these foundational issues that will be addressed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

THE ECM AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the theological basis for the ECM's understanding of what it means to be missional. Unfortunately, this is not possible purely on the writings of ECM leaders alone, which still represents a young, growing body of literature in its early stages of dealing with the theological issues of concern to the movement. The theologians and schools of thought exhibiting the greatest influence on the ECM are, however, easily discernable, as they are frequently quoted and discussed in the published ECM writings as well as online in the forms of various blogs and forums. An evaluation of what these influences are saying in terms of the missional discussion are invaluable in properly understanding the roots and contexts of much that is being discussed and practiced within the broader ECM. In this regard, some of the leading figures that will feature prominently in this chapter are N.T. Wright, David Bosch, Leslie Newbigin, Scott McKnight and the writings coming out of the Gospel and our Culture Network from scholars such as Darryl Guder, George Hunsberger, Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew. With regards to issues of the atonement, the work of Baker and Green, has also been significant, particularly amongst those making up Emergent Village.

It is impossible within the confines of this paper to conduct a thorough study that would incorporate all the possible influences on the ECM in terms of its missional understanding, and just as impossible, due to the diversity that does exist within

the movement, to produce a synthesis of these various influences that could be considered an all encompassing general statement within the bounds of which, all the various positions and beliefs of emerging churches would be fully represented. It is therefore important at the outset of this chapter to state that the aim of this exercise is to identify the dominant influences on the ECM's theology of missions and to provide a fairly representative description thereof that is able to function not as a final definition, but rather as a fair representation of a more centrist ECM understanding against which positions and opinions left and right of centre can be better evaluated and understood.

Based on the findings of the previous chapter, a consideration of the ECM's understanding of missional logically requires an examination of their concept of God's mission, for they are directly related. This chapter will show that the ECM looks for its answers and definitions of these terms in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In doing so, the ECM discovers the Kingdom of God, as the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham and the restoration of all creation defaced by the Fall and the presence of evil in the world, to be central and identifies the need for a church that is consciously shaped by its understanding of the kingdom of God and the narrative of Scripture.

4.1. The Mission is Kingdom Shaped

Robinson (2006:12-13) speaks of new contextual situations that force leaders to ask the "how" questions which they perceive as being vital to their survival. In this process, however, they discover that they are not able to adequately answer such

questions until they have re-established for themselves the true essence of what it is they are about or are doing – their mission. In other words, a true process of engaging the “how” questions, invariably leads one to the realisation that it is necessary to first consider the “what questions”¹⁸ before suitable answers to the “how questions” can be arrived at – a basic process of deconstruction and reconstruction. .

Hunsberger (1998:87), in agreement with Robinson, suggests that this is especially true at times of greater social and cultural shifts. He states,

Such transformations raise questions about how the church will fit in its altered setting, and these questions lead ultimately to queries about whether the church’s forms reflect an authentic hearing of the gospel and a genuine sharing in its vision.

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:48-49) describe the practical outworking of Robinson’s thesis in their portrayal of the general experience of the numerous ECM leaders they interviewed as being a realisation that something was seriously wrong with the church and that a fresh understanding of the gospel was needed to be able to proceed any further. Under the influence of authors like N.T. Wright, Dallas Willard and Brian McLaren, these emerging leaders shifted their starting point of focus from the Epistles to the Gospels in their attempts to understand the man and message of Jesus, and therefore the gospel, more profoundly. This refocusing has led to a growing majority opinion within the movement that it is not only the methods of the modern church that need to change, but its message too. Van Gelder (2000:33) writes,

¹⁸ What is the essence of the Christianity? What is the church? What is the Gospel? What is mission? What is evangelism? What do we mean by church planting? What kind of churches should we be planting? What is leadership? What do we mean by ministry? (Robinson, 2006:13).

While generational adjustments have always been somewhat normative for the church, it appears that the scope of change in the present shift is calling for a fundamental rethinking of how we understand both the gospel and the church.

If becoming missional provides a broad answer to the “how” question of being and doing church, the necessary preliminary question that needs to be asked, and is being asked by the ECM, is “What is the mission?” How one understands and engages in being missional will logically be determined by what one understands the mission to be.

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:91) describe the ECM as having discovered its missional identity in an understanding of the *Missio Dei* rooted in Christ’s teaching and modelling of the “gospel of the kingdom” as recorded in the Gospels. It is this understanding that lies at the heart of the ECM’s being, and is the primary shaping factor in terms of its methods, practices, priorities and values.

Frost and Hirsch (2003:112-113) suggest that the ECM feels the traditional Protestant church of Christendom has erred in its reading of Jesus and the Gospel through dogmatic ontological formulas (the creeds) and/or through almost exclusively Pauline eyes (referring specifically to the Pauline theology of the Reformation) with the result that the primary historical portrait of Christ (the focal point of authentic New Testament faith), his message and his mission have become obscured. Proponents of the ECM are doubtful that Paul himself read Jesus this way. It is important to clarify that the ECM does not see any contradiction between the theology of Paul and the theology of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. Where they do see a contradiction, however, is between

the modern traditional reading of Paul and what they propose as the authentic mission and message of Jesus Christ. They propose that the solution comes in reversing the formula and reading the Epistles, and all the writers in Scripture for that matter, through the perspective of the Gospels. For the ECM, it is the Christology of the Gospels¹⁹ (the answer to the “what” questions) that must of necessity define missiology and ecclesiology (the answer to the “how” questions) in accordance with John 20:21 - “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”. Goheen (2000:136) believes that it is in this mandate that the church discovers its missional identity and nature. The way the mission of Jesus is understood then will logically define the content of the church’s missional identity and nature.

Hunsberger (1998:88) makes the distinction between the gospel *about* Jesus – the proclamation of good news made by the churches of the New Testament – and the gospel *of* Jesus – that which Jesus himself proclaimed as the good news. The early church proclaimed a gospel *about* Jesus that was shaped by the gospel *of* Jesus (of which he was also the physical embodiment) – something that the ECM and the scholars they draw on claim that the modern evangelical church has to some degree lost.

ECM leaders and thinkers don’t necessarily deny the truthfulness of the modern Reformation based Protestant understanding of the Gospel, but see their duty as that of exposing it as a reduction of the whole. In other words, the elements of the Gospel that are emphasised in its current popular form are only one part of the Gospel, and therefore while not necessarily false in and of themselves, an

¹⁹ Together with the Christology of the rest of the New Testament interpreted through the lens of the Gospels.

unavoidable distortion of the whole occurs by focusing so narrowly on one aspect to the exclusion of the rest, which ECM proponents suggest is in fact to be unfaithful to the Gospel message and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The alleged reduced understanding of Jesus and the Gospel that the ECM takes to task is that of Jesus only as “someone whose main job was to die so my sins could be forgiven and I could go to heaven” – as recounted by Brian McLaren (2006a:33) in his reflection on his own experiences of the person and work of Jesus as taught to him in church. In his book, *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel*²⁰, McLaren (2003:19-27) proposes that understanding salvation purely in terms of forgiveness of sins is to miss the full point of salvation. In his book, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* Dan Kimball relates a similar concern in his reflection on a modern, propositional presentation of the gospel he heard given at an evangelistic event. He states (2003:201-202):

He clearly communicated that God loves us (John 3:16) and that sin separates us from God (Rom. 3:23). We were told that the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus (Rom. 6:23) and that faith in Jesus by grace will allow us to have our sins forgiven and to enter heaven when we die.

For Kimball (ibid.), like McLaren, the church’s inclination to make this the sum total of its gospel proclamation has been to subtly stop short of explaining the full beauty of what the gospel is, and in fact to lay the foundations for the consumerist form of Christianity that is so prevalent today. The ECM sees itself, then, not as adding to the gospel, but rather as playing an important role in recovering or

²⁰ Co-authored with Tony Campolo.

rediscovering the full message and intent of Jesus and the Gospel, and its implications for the form and mission of the church.

Hunsberger (1998:89) suggests that the critical question then is: What did Jesus (who is the good news) have to say when he announced the good news? What was the gospel that he preached? The answer: Mark1:14-15 – *Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news’*. Jesus’ public ministry was characterised by his proclamation and demonstration of the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God .

For the ECM it is a proper understanding of this Gospel of the Kingdom of God that provides the most adequate framework for the Church’s best understanding of itself and its place and mission in the world in terms of its relationship to God and His mission.

4.2. The Mission is Narratively Formed

For both Wright and Newbigin, and consequently for the ECM, Jesus’ pronouncement of the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God did not happen in a vacuum and therefore cannot be discerned in a way that doesn’t take proper account of its original context. What did Jesus mean by the statement that God’s Kingdom had arrived? For Wright and Newbigin, a credible answer to this question can only be established on the basis of a proper consideration of the story of which Christ is himself the culmination and fulfilment. In Scripture, the

gospel does not stand alone as a disconnected message; rather it is part of a long history in which God revealed his redemptive purposes in the events of one nation – Israel. Wright (2008:2) says: “The Gospels demand to be read in deep and radical integration with the Old Testament.” His reasoning behind this statement is his belief that what happened in Jesus Christ was in fact the climax of the story of Israel and therefore fundamental to the Christian worldview. He states (2006:62) “Trying to understand him without understanding what that story was, how it worked and what it meant is like trying to understand why someone is hitting a ball with a stick without knowing what baseball, or indeed cricket, is all about.”

Newbigin (1991:2-3), too, emphasises the necessity of understanding the Gospel in terms of its broader Biblical context when he says: “I do not believe that we can speak effectively of the Gospel as a word addressed to our culture unless we recover a sense of the Scriptures as a canonical whole, as the story which provides the true context for our understanding of the meaning of our lives – both personal and public.”

For Wright and Newbigin, the story is essentially a simple one. Wright (2006:75) describes it, for all intents and purposes, as the story of God putting the entire creation back to rights, filling heaven and earth with his glory. Newbigin (1978:36), likewise, speaks of the biblical story having as its main concern God’s purpose of blessing for all nations and “the completion of God’s purposes in the creation of the world and of man within the world”. It becomes very apparent that the ECM is speaking the language of Newbigin and Wright when we consider too their reaction against a ‘narrow’ interpretation of the Gospel that only offers a way of

escape for the redeemed soul out of history. For Wright and Newbigin this is to completely miss the point of the record of Scripture, which rather reveals God's plans and actions to bring history to its true end (ibid.).

Newbigin (1978:33) identifies the fact that while the narrative of the Old Testament is a story about a people group – the nation of Israel – as the recipients and bearers of God's revelation, and the New Testament, similarly, is a narrative about Jesus Christ and the formation and growth of a new community – the Church – recipients and bearers of that same revelation entrusted to Old Testament Israel but now fulfilled and enlarged in the coming of Christ - the Biblical record is not just the story of these two groups of people, it is universal history. It tells the story of the cosmos. He states (ibid.):

... the Bible is unique among the sacred books of the world's religions in that it is in structure a history of the cosmos ... it sees the history of the nations and the history of nature within in the large framework of God's history – the carrying forward to its completion of the gracious purpose which has its source in the love of the Father for the Son in the unity of the Spirit. The first announcement of the good news that the reign of God is at hand can only be understood in the context of this biblical sketch of universal history. The reign of God is his reign over all things.

In adopting such an understanding of the nature of Scripture, Newbigin does not downplay the significance of the individual stories of Israel (and its descendants) and the Church, but rather suggests that interpreting their individual stories more consistently in terms of the bigger picture is the way to most properly appreciate and understand their true meaning and significance.

Wright (2008:2) suggests that the Old Testament is the “narrative of how the Creator God is rescuing creation from its otherwise inevitable fate, and it was this

project, rather than some other, which was brought to successful completion in and through Jesus.”

For Wright (1989:13-14), the best way to understand the Biblical narrative (Old and New Testaments) is to see it as a five-act play. He recommends the following model: 1) Creation; 2) Fall; 3) Israel; 4) Jesus. The first four acts tell the story of the Old Testament and Jesus. The New Testament then forms the first scene in the fifth act with the rest of the fifth act being played out now in the history of the church. The New Testament, together with the Old Testaments, as the earlier acts of the same story act authoritatively to provide hints and directions for the actors (the church) in the final act as to their role and how the play is supposed to end. Wright (2005:124) states: “To live in the fifth act is ... to be conscious of living as the people through whom the narrative in question is now moving toward its final destination.”

Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen (nd:7) employ and further develop Wright’s five-act model with the addition of a sixth act: The Return of the King – Redemption Completed.

What follows is a basic summary of how Goheen and Wright generally understand the plot of the Bible according to these five/six acts (adapted primarily from Bartholomew and Goheen’s “The Storyline of the Bible” and Wright’s “Simply Christian”):

Act 1: Creation - God Establishes His Kingdom

The Biblical drama begins with God's act of creating the universe and all that is in it. He is the Supreme Ruler and calls all things into being by His Sovereign decree. All things are good in God's sight and every creature and system functions in perfect harmony and balance. God creates humans as the climax of His creation, in His own image. They are given the responsibility of being stewards of the world He has created. Adam and Eve enjoy warm and unhindered fellowship with God. (Bartholomew and Goheen nd:1).

Act 2: Fall – Rebellion in the Kingdom

The opening of act two is full of hope and anticipation as Adam and Eve live rich lives in the presence of God and in his created world. They are given one prohibition – they are not to eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. If they do, death will come and everything will be ruined. As they submit to God's word they enjoy the blessing of life as trustful and dependent creatures under God's care. When Satan tempts Adam and Eve with another "truth", and they submit to this word by disobeying God and eating the fruit – rebellion – they find God's warning to be true. They become estranged from God and His presence and their own relationship with one another has become damaged and tainted by selfishness. Death has also entered the world and all creation now feels the effects of their revolt and a world out of sync with its creator (ibid).

Act 3: Redemption Initiated – The King Chooses Israel

The question arises: “How will God respond to a world that has chosen to go its own way and that continues to ignore his good plans?” (ibid.). He begins by acting in judgement – expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden. At the same time, however, He brings hope by promising to crush “all the evil forces that Adam and Eve have unleashed in their foolish mutiny (Gen 3:15)” (ibid.).

The story, however, seems to go from bad to worse. From rebellion in the garden in Genesis 3, to the first murder in chapter 4. In Genesis 6 one sees the growth and spread of violence in the world leading up to a critical point in chapter 11 where the height of human pride and autonomy is displayed in their attempt to build a tower that reaches to the heavens. In response, God acts to confuse their languages and scatter them across the face of the earth (Wright, 2006a:64)

However, in Genesis 12, a great turning point occurs when God calls Abram and makes a covenant with him (a binding agreement that is repeated and developed over the following chapters) that is effectively a promise that the families of the earth, now divided and confused as a result of their autonomy and rebellion against God and his rule, having ruined their own lives and that of the world at large, will again be ‘put to rights’. Abraham and his descendents become then the spearhead of God’s rescue operation in the world (ibid). Wright (ibid., p.65) makes the statement that:

Through Abraham and his family, God will bless the whole world. Shimmering like a mirage in the deserts through which Abraham wandered was the vision of a new world, a rescued world, a world blessed by the creator once more, a world of justice, where God and his people would live

in harmony, where human relationships would flourish, where beauty would triumph over ugliness. It would be a world in which the voices that echo in all human consciousness would blend together and be heard as the voice of the living God.

In the thought of Newbigin and Wright, Abraham and Israel's election, although seemingly to the exclusion of the other nations, is not God's way of writing off the rest of humanity, but in fact His means of bringing them again into a place of His blessing and care. The promised blessing then is made not just for Abraham, but for all the nations. Abraham and Israel are the bearers of this covenant promise but they are by no means its exclusive beneficiaries (Newbigin 1978:34).

Four hundred years pass before the story picks up again. Abraham's descendents (Israel), after growing numerous in the land of Egypt are subjected to slavery and oppression by the Egyptian Pharaoh. It is in this context that the book of Exodus opens with God's intentions and action to liberate Israel from this oppressive rule that they might return to Him and live in the land He had promised to their father, Abraham. In a series of dramatic acts Israel is miraculously saved and freed from Egyptian captivity as they cross the Red Sea and arrive at Mount Sinai – the place they would meet their God. Bartholomew and Goheen (nd:3-4) ask the question: "Why has God done all of this for Israel?" Their answer:

God has a job for them to do. They are to be a nation and kingdom that function like priests. Their task is to mediate God's blessing to the nations and to act as a model people attracting all peoples to God (Ex. 19:3-6). This is the calling that will shape Israel from this point on: they are to be a showcase people and a model before the nations that embody the beauty of God's original design for human life. After giving them this task, God gives them the law to guide their lives, and the people of Israel commit themselves to living as God's faithful people. God then commands them to build a tent where he will take up residence. From now on, wherever they go, God will live visibly among them.

For Wright (2006a:65), however, a large problem remained unresolved. There was no problem with the covenant on God's part – it was absolutely certain and sure. But, as he phrases the question: "What happens when the lifeboat which sets off to rescue the wrecked ship is itself trapped between the rocks and the waves, itself in need of rescue?" As the narrative unfolds it becomes abundantly apparent that Israel finds itself existing with an irreconcilable tension – they are at the same time both bearer of the solution and part of the problem.

This is clearly evident in Israel's unfolding story. Bartholomew and Goheen (nd:4) point out that though the Davidic Kingdom is established, as the story progresses, under the leadership of their Kings, Israel (and later Israel and Judah after the split of the kingdom) display repeated cycles of idolatry and disobedience. Although God would send many prophets to warn of His impending judgement should they continue in their rebellion, for the most part their warnings fall on deaf ears. The result – exile. First, the citizens of the northern kingdom (722 B.C.) and then those of the southern kingdom (586 B.C.) are captured by the ruling empires of the day. Wright (2006a:65-66) answers his own question of how God would react to the situation where Israel, who were meant to be part of the solution, was itself now in need of rescue with the following statement:

God will act from within the creation itself, with all the ambiguities and paradoxes that will result in order to deal with the multiple problems that have resulted from human rebellion, and so restore creation itself. And he will act from within the covenant people themselves, to complete the rescue operation and fulfil its original purpose.

For Wright (2006a:66), this is the reason the recurring theme of exile and restoration, or slavery and exodus forms the dominant motif of the story of Israel. Ultimately, however, the real exile is not just Israel's story, but that of all humanity

when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden in Genesis. Wright (ibid. p.75) states: “Israel’s multiple exiles and restorations are ways of re-enacting that primal expulsion, and symbolically expressing the hope for homecoming, for humankind to be restored, for God’s people to be rescued, for creation itself to be renewed.” It is this motif and story that Jesus of Nazareth would eventually finally tell, enact and fulfil in his words, actions, death and resurrection.

Wright identifies four primary themes that give the shape and body to this main story and motif as it is developed in the scenes and writings leading up to the fourth and fifth ‘acts’: a) the King, b) the Temple, c) the Torah and d) the New Creation.

a) *The King:*

Wright (ibid. p.70) notes that in 2 Samuel 7 God promises David that his royal house would continue forever. The very next chapter, however, details Samuel’s warnings concerning the oppressive nature of human kingly rule. Albeit in varying degrees, the fulfilment of Samuel’s warnings can be seen in the legacies of Israel’s Kings, to the extent that even the righteous Kings could not prevent God’s judgement of exile. On the one hand God makes promises to David that, as Israel’s history progresses, seem to come to nothing; on the other the development and growth of a prophetic hope emerges of a new kind of king from David’s line – a king who would set everything right, bringing a rule of justice and righteousness for all the poor and oppressed.

b) *The Temple:*

Wright (ibid. p.71) describes the Temple as being the place, in Jewish thought, where heaven and earth met. The Second Temple, built after the Israelites return from Babylonian exile, was a shadow of the glory of Solomon's Temple. Although the temple would be given special attention during the reigns of Judas Maccabeus and Herod the Great (none of whom were descendents of David), there emerged a growing expectation that part of the central task of the Messianic king would also "involve the proper establishment of the place where heaven and earth met."

c) *The Torah*

According to Wright (ibid. p.72), the first five books of the Old Testament accomplish at least two things: 1) telling the ancient story of slavery and freedom, of exile and homecoming, of oppression and Passover; and 2) setting out the pattern of life for the people having been rescued. For Wright (ibid.), the heart of the Torah is about "how that people would live together, under God and in harmony – that is, justice – with one another." Focused study of Torah – that which binds God's people together – would become a vital characteristic of Israelite society from the time of the Babylonian exile to the time of Jesus and beyond.

d) *New Creation:*

Wright (2006:72) draws attention to the book of Isaiah as the place in the Old Testament where one most clearly see the hopes for "king, Temple and Torah, for

worldwide peace, for the replanting of the Garden of Eden, for nothing short of new creation” coming together. As promised to Abraham, through this nation God would bring restoration, healing and justice to all the nations (Is. 2:2-4) – the whole world – and he would accomplish it through the arrival of his anointed king (Is. 11:1-9). Under the rule of the Messiah, peace, justice and complete harmony in all creation can be found for all who respond to his invitation to find it there (Is. 55:1,3-5,12-13). Wright (ibid. p.74) interprets God’s promise to be the “renewal of the entire cosmos, of heaven and earth together, and the promise that in this new world all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well” (Is. 65:17-18, 25).

Wright (2006:77) concludes:

The God of Israel is the creator and redeemer of Israel and the world. In faithfulness to his ancient promises, he will act within Israel and the world, to bring to its climax the great story of exile and restoration, of the divine rescue operation, of the king who brings justice, the Temple that joins heaven and earth, the Torah that binds God’s people together, and of creation healed and restored (2006:77).

Interlude: Intertestamental Period – A Kingdom Story Waiting for an Ending

Even though the previous act ends with Israel resettling in the land after exile, albeit in a very different condition to what they had know there before, with Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple only a shadow of their former selves and constantly under threat from the surrounding nations and superpowers of their day, the nation continues to live during this 400 year period with the belief and hope that they are God’s chosen people and that God would yet act to bring His kingdom. Under the oppression of the Persians, Greeks, Syrians and Romans, this hope is intensified, and although varying viewpoints develop amongst the

Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essences as to how God would bring about the fulfilment of His promises, Bartholomew and Goheen (nd:5) conclude that “...all of Israel agrees: their story is waiting for an ending. The Kingdom will come soon.”

Act 4: Redemption Accomplished – The Coming of the Kingdom

It is into the context of expectation and anticipation that Jesus arrives and begins to announce the coming of the kingdom – in Him! Jesus’ proclamation “The Kingdom of God is at hand” was addressed to the Jewish people at a time when they were growing increasingly anxious for God to deliver them from pagan Roman rule and finally establish His perfect kingdom by the coming of His Messiah. Wright (2006a:86) identifies four promises/prophecies contained in the words of Isaiah that do well to define the time of the arrival of God’s kingdom. It would be a time when:

- a) God’s promises and purposes would be fulfilled
- b) Israel would be rescued from pagan oppression
- c) Evil (particularly the evil of oppressive empires) would be judged
- d) God would usher in a new reign of justice and peace

Bartholomew and Goheen (nd:5) interpret Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom to be his declaration that “God is now acting in love and power to restore the creation and humanity to live again under the kind merciful and just rule of God, the way God designed it all in the beginning.” God is not, however, doing it in the way that the various Jewish groups might have been expecting. Jesus does not come as the freedom fighter who will challenge and overcome the authority of Rome, and although He announces the coming kingdom of God, nothing substantial in terms

of Israel's composition, status or situation seems to change. Instead, He gathers around Himself an unlikely band of followers and, as Bartholomew and Goheen (ibid.) say, "calls them the new vanguard of God's coming new world." He acts miraculously, freeing people from sickness and evil spirits thereby displaying God's restorative power. He challenges the customs and expectations of the day and teaches his disciples "to live lives steeped in love, forgiveness, and righteousness" (ibid). He teaches them about how God's kingdom is in fact coming – not by revenge but forgiveness; not by destroying your enemies but by loving them; not by force but by suffering; not by religious piety but by embracing the outcast (ibid).

As opposition to Jesus grows, particularly from within the camp of the Jewish religious leaders, the story reaches its climax in the scene when He is arrested, put on a mock trial, and handed over for execution by way of Roman crucifixion. It's a scene that made no sense in the eyes of those who had the faith to see Jesus as the promised Messiah – their king defeated in the most disgraceful of deaths. Yet, as Bartholomew & Goheen (ibid.) state, it is these very same followers who "declare weeks later that it is at that very moment – in the shame and pain of the cross – that God accomplishes his plan to recover his lost and broken world. Here Jesus takes the sin and brokenness of the world on himself so that the world might be healed ... His resurrection is the sign of his victory over evil; it is the first evidence of a new world dawning."

The fourth act ends with Jesus' commissioning of His followers to continue in doing that which they saw Him doing (John 20:21). Bartholomew and Goheen

(ibid.) paraphrase this as: “You are to make known God’s coming rule in your lives, your deeds and your words. God’s new world will come in time. When that happens, everything that resists that rule will be destroyed. But until then, announce its coming and show by the way you live that it is a reality.”

Act 5: The Church’s Mission – Spreading the News of the Kingdom

Act 5 begins with the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in accordance with the words of the OT prophets and Jesus Himself (Acts 2). Bartholomew and Goheen (ibid., p.6) state: “He comes, intent on bringing the new life of God’s kingdom to all who turn from sin, believe renewal has come in Jesus, and are baptised into the emerging kingdom community.” The book of Acts sees this new kingdom community in Jerusalem embracing the life of God’s kingdom (Acts 2:42 – the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper) and as a result the church begins to grow. The church begins to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and into Samaria, and after a new centre is established into Antioch and the commissioning of Paul and Barnabus (Acts 13:1-3), into the rest of the Roman Empire too. The rest of the New Testament is a collection of the writings of Paul and other apostles and leaders written to instruct these new fledgling church communities as to what to believe about the good news of Jesus and how to live faithfully under God’s rule in their context. The book of Acts ends with Paul’s Roman house-imprisonment, but with no finality or end to the story that the biblical record has been communicating. The reason, for Wright, Bartholomew and Goheen is simple: The story is not finished yet! (Ibid).

It is this presupposition that lays the foundation for the still unfolding scenes of the rest of Act 5. This, in all generations since then, is the church's place in the story. Bartholomew and Goheen suggest that the church even now, as it embraces, lives in, embodies, and spreads the good news of Jesus and the kingdom, "picks up Israel's task of being a showcase of what God intends for human life (Ex. 19:3-6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-12)" and continues "the Kingdom mission that Jesus began among the Jews, a kingdom established now among all the peoples of the earth." For Bartholomew and Goheen (ibid.) the mission of God's people is to make known the good news of the kingdom. Wright (2006a:98) interprets the references in the book of Acts to Christ's resurrection as essentially saying, "If Jesus has been raised, that means that God's new world, God's kingdom has indeed arrived; and that means we have a job to do. The world must hear what the God of Israel, the creator God, has achieved through his Messiah."

Act 6: Redemption Completed – The Return of the King

Bartholomew & Goheen (nd:7) modify N.T. Wright's 5 act model by making a distinction between the end of the narrative and the closing of act 5 by adding a sixth act. Wright, Bartholomew and Goheen all embrace the general principle of G.E. Ladd's "now-not-yet" understanding of the kingdom in the present age and all hold very strongly to the theology of a still coming day when Jesus will return to this world and finally and fully complete the work He had begun - the day when resurrection life will be completely established in the renewal of heaven and earth and all God's opponents will be overthrown and defeated. This is the appointed end towards which God is moving all history – the day when God will make all

things new (Rev. 21:5) and all evil, pain and suffering will be done away with as joy in the fullness of the presence of God becomes the new reality of His kingdom people.

4.3. An ECM definition of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God

4.3.1. Preliminary Considerations

What is the gospel? Listening to Wright, Newbigin, Hunsberger and the other voices making up the GOCN,²¹ the first answer to that question is quite decisive: Jesus, Himself, is the gospel! As Hunsberger (1998:87) states: “The New Testament’s Gospels narrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the action of God that both reveals God’s passion for the world and achieves God’s purpose for that world.”

According to Wright (2006a:78) Jesus’ life and ministry were not simply about introducing a new moral teaching, or offering a wonderful moral example, or even about just “demonstrating or accomplishing a new route by which people can go to heaven when they die.” This does not imply that one’s present beliefs and actions do not have lasting consequences, but rather that this was not the main focus of Jesus’ work and therefore not the main point of Christianity. Humanity’s problem is not just ignorance, but rather that they are lost, dying and without true life. For Wright (ibid.) and those making up the voices of the ECM, Christianity is rather about: “... the belief that the living God, in fulfilment of his promises and as the

²¹ The Gospel and Our Culture Network

climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this – the finding, the saving, the giving of new life – in Jesus. He has done it.”

For this reason the gospel of Jesus can be defined as that which He proclaimed, as well as that which He accomplished by His physical embodiment of that which He proclaimed. It is in this sense that ECM leaders and writers speak of the gospel “being” Jesus – Jesus is the gospel. The persistent criticism of the ECM against much of modern popular Christianity is that it has neglected vital aspects of the gospel of Jesus in its proclamation *about* Jesus, and has therefore not allowed it to properly inform its understanding, proclamation, and practice of the gospel as a gospel-community.

As has already been established, the ECM, in agreement with that which current New Testament scholarship in general has accepted, identifies Jesus’ gospel as a proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom of God – the good news that the reign of God was at hand. As Norman Perrin (1967:54) states: “Jesus appeared as one who proclaimed the Kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves a function in relation to that proclamation and derives its meaning from it” (Mark 1:1, 14-15; Luke 4; Matt 10:7).

Although there would appear to be an almost unanimous consensus across the theological spectrum as to the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the proclamation and ministry of Jesus Christ, there is certainly no such unanimity when it comes to questions regarding the nature of this kingdom and how it is appropriated in and through the teaching and ministry of Jesus. For example, Robert Recker

(1979:156) highlights several widely-held historical interpretations: 1) The Kingdom of God is future and will be inaugurated at the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. 2) The Kingdom is future and will be inaugurated at the millennium. 3) The Kingdom is present now in the form of the Church. 4) The Kingdom is present now in the hearts of Christians. 5) The Kingdom is progressive and is ushered in through the transformation of human society. 6) The Kingdom is a redemptive rule that is already present but not yet completely.

The Emerging Church and Missional Church movements are not ignorant of the historical debates and attempt to navigate the waters with an attitude that welcomes the element of mystery in wrestling with and applying this issue. Hunsberger (1998:90) establishes the boundaries within which these questions need to be considered. He suggests that Jesus' own teaching on this subject as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels has a certain indefinable quality and describes it as both a mystery and an open secret, consistent with Jesus' teaching style – often in parables – where His intention was often to both reveal and hide certain elements at the same time. For this reason it has to be conceded that a definitive answer on the matter cannot be given. Hunsberger (ibid.) suggests, however, that a “sketch of its contours” is possible when it is considered against the backdrop of the Old Testament prophetic expectation of God's intended future for the world – one summarised in the previous section as new creation and *shalom* under the perfect reign of God. Hunsberger (ibid., p.91) states that “shalom envisions the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God's demanding care and passionate rule.”

For all its appreciation of the mystery of the Kingdom, however, the ECM does indeed have a very definite viewpoint regarding the nature of the Kingdom, and a survey of the relevant literature reveals that it is directly linked to their understanding of the nature of the atonement. Both issues are co-dependent on each other. Therefore in order to understand the ECM's perception of the Kingdom, one needs to understand their perception of the atonement and vice-versa.

4.3.2. The Nature of the Atonement

If the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ are the climactic point through which the Kingdom of God was birthed in the world and made accessible to all people, before one can adequately discuss the nature of this Kingdom, it is fundamentally significant that one should first properly consider exactly what did Christ do and accomplish in his incarnation, death and resurrection, or using the language of N.T Wright (2006b:59), how has God worked to “put the world to rights” in and through Jesus Christ?

Therefore, along with the ECM's insistence on a more holistic understanding of the Gospel as the good news of the Kingdom of God, comes the corollary insistence that the Western church in general is in need of a more holistic understanding of the nature of the atonement. Hunsberger (1998:2) points out two tendencies observable in the history of the church that serve to highlight and explain the myopic focus of the church during Christendom.

First, “the church has tended to separate the news of the reign of God from God’s provision for humanity’s salvation” (ibid.). The result thereof can be observed in much of current Christianity. God’s salvation has become a purely private affair and event with the good news of “my personal salvation” having no real connection or commitment to the good news of God’s healing reign coming to the world.

Second, “the church has also tended to envision itself in a variety of ways unconnected to what must be fundamental for it – its relation to the reign of God” (ibid.). Locating its crucial reference point only in the good news of personal salvation and losing a sense of the narrative whole of Scripture is a big part of the reason the Western church found itself subtly accommodating itself so much to the modern individualistic mindset. What the ECM, together with the influential scholars and authors they draw upon, propose, is a more robust theory of the atonement that better takes into account and reflects the entire narrative of Scripture.

In this regard, the ECM is keen to point out that there has been no one consistently agreed upon theory of the atonement in church history and that the church has never formally defined the atonement (cf. Wright 2007:1) Instead there is a growing realisation that instead of one all-encompassing doctrine of the atonement, there are in fact multiple metaphors that describe different aspects of the atonement. The situation is described in a way that bears a striking resemblance to the story of the six blind men feeling different parts of the same elephant and telling each other what an elephant looks like. What is needed, it

would seem, is that the church needs to rediscover and embrace all of these to fully appreciate and live out the reality of its calling and formation as an atonement community.

In this regard Scot McKnight (2007:37) states that “Atonement theories are imaginative metaphors that speak of the concrete reality of what God does through Jesus Christ.” These metaphors are in and of themselves “not the thing” (as McKnight puts it) but point to or carry us to “the thing”. He says (2007:38), “The metaphor gives the reader or hearer an imagination of the thing, a vision of the thing, a window onto the thing, a lens through which to look in order to see the thing. Metaphors take us there, but they are not the “there.” E.g. A sacrificial metaphor – offering; a legal metaphor – justification; an interpersonal metaphor – reconciliation; a commercial metaphor – redemption; a military metaphor – ransom.

Wright (2007:1) adds his support to this perception of how atonement should be understood by recounting that Jesus gave his disciple a meal, not a theory, when he wanted to explain to them the meaning of his impending death. He does state that “Of course, the earliest exponent of that meal (Paul, in 1 Corinthians) insists that it matters quite a lot that you understand what you are about as you come to share in it; but still it is the meal, not the understanding, that is the primary vehicle of meaning.”

McKnight uses the metaphor of golf to communicate the idea that one cannot just make use of one metaphor for the atonement (e.g. penal substitution) and reduce all other metaphors to aspects of penal substitution. McKnight’s example of golf

suggests that one doesn't play an entire hole or course using only one club. In the same way one should actively use the various metaphors of the atonement found in the Bible.

The history of the church shows that various metaphors have been emphasised at various times. Green and Baker, in their book "Recovering the Scandal of the Cross" (which is often referred to in Emergent writings on the subject of the Atonement) outline the historical development of the various major models and theories of the atonement held to by the church over the centuries since the era of the apostles. These models are identified as: 1) Christus Victor; 2) satisfaction; 3) moral influence; and 4) penal substitution. Green and Baker do allow for the fact that "throughout church history many church leaders, missionaries and theologians have combined elements from more than one of these categories in their teaching about the cross" (2000:117). Their stated purpose in this study, however, is "not so much to catalog information about atonement theories but to develop a practice of thinking critically about explanations of the atonement" (ibid.).

Wright (2007:13), while in agreement with McKnight that a more well-rounded and representative understanding of the Atonement is required does, however, still find himself leaning towards one particular theme – Christus Victor – as the overarching one that narratively makes most sense of the 'political', 'historical' and 'theological' reasons for Jesus' death and brings cohesion to the other themes. Wright argues that although Christ accomplished many things through his incarnation, death and resurrection, they are understood best within the framework provided by the Christus Victor model of the atonement.

A survey of the various blogs and writings of the ECM shows a consistent emphasis on both these positions: 1) an emphasis on a holistic understanding of the metaphors of the atonement; and 2) increasing support for and recognition of the importance of the Christus Victor theme. For this reason, a brief summary of the four major atonement models mentioned above, and as represented by Green and Baker, will be presented in the paragraphs to follow. The Christus Victor theme, however, will receive a more comprehensive treatment as it is probably the most influential in ECM circles at present and the most influential in their understanding of the present nature of the Kingdom and the role of the Church in the world today.

The Satisfaction Model

Green and Baker (2000:126) identify Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) as the figure most commonly associated with the origins of this model. His model finds as its central motif the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross as the only offering that perfectly satisfies the debt owed to God by sinful humanity. Although there are significant similarities between Anselm's satisfaction model and later penal substitution models, there are also significant differences, and the distinctions need to be kept in perspective.

Green and Baker (ibid. p.127) suggest that Anselm sought to write a logical explanation for the necessity of Christ's death on the cross by using the imagery of the feudalistic system of his day as his framework. In this model the themes of honour and satisfaction occupy a central role. Green and Baker describe the society of which Anselm was a member as "a carefully managed series of

reciprocal obligations ... The Lord provided capital and protection; the serf provided honor, loyalty and tribute.” In this system the Lord was always obligated to protect his honour. If a vassal failed to fulfil the requirements of an oath, it would be necessary for him to offer something as a means of satisfying his offended lord. The extent of the offering required would be determined by the status of the offended. Because of His immeasurable status and the inability of sinful people to compensate, God in His grace makes the payment necessary for the satisfaction of his honour in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (ibid. pp.130-131).

The Moral Influence Model

According to Green and Baker (ibid. pp.136-137), it is Peter Abelard (1079-1142) that is most commonly associated with the development of this model. Abelard asks the same question as Anselm of why it was necessary for God to take human nature upon himself so that he might redeem people by dying in the flesh.²² He arrives at a different answer however, preferring to understand the nature of God’s forgiveness as a free act of his will indeterminate of any other pre-conditions that need to be met in order for it to be just. For Abelard, the atoning value of Christ’s death does not lie in its ability to satisfy a debt owed to God, but rather as “a demonstration of God’s love that moves sinners to repent and love God.”

²² C.f. Abelard – “Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans”

The Penal Substitutionary Model

Green and Baker (ibid. pp.140-143) comment that the Penal Substitutionary model of the atonement as it exists in contemporary Christianity owes much to the theology that emerged from the Protestant Reformation and the writings of its theologians like Calvin and Luther. Like Anselm's satisfaction model it too sees the necessity for the payment of a debt owed to God, but differs significantly in the nature thereof. Whereas the satisfaction model requires a debt to be paid to satisfy the honour of God, penal substitutionary theory sees Christ, in an act of God's grace, bearing the punishment of the Father against human sin as their substitute, thereby satisfying the justice and wrath of God on their behalf. Sinful people's sins are imputed to Christ, but in accordance with God's demands of utter perfection for entry into his presence, Christ's righteousness and obedience is imputed to repentant sinners too. It is a double exchange.

The Christus Victor Model

Baker and Green (ibid. p.118) posit that the Christian writers in the period immediately following that of the apostles consistently proclaimed salvation by the cross without offering any substantial explanation as to exactly how the cross provided this salvation. It was only really towards the end of the second century that church leaders like Irenaeus began to offer a fuller treatment on the subject that offered explanations for these fundamental questions: *Why did Jesus have to die?* and *How did that effect our salvation?*

History makes it abundantly clear that the early church lived in strong tension with its societal host. Proclaiming and asserting that Jesus Christ was Lord in a world where the official position was that Caesar was Lord made symbiotic relationship impossible. As a result, the early church knew persecution as its normative reality. Baker and Green (ibid.) suggest that it was therefore not surprising that “Christians framed their discussion of the cross and the resurrection in terms of a cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil with the resurrection sealing Jesus Christ’s victory over sin, the devil and powers of evil.” The term *Christus Victor* comes from Gustaf Aulén’s book²³ bearing the same name wherein he draws attention to this early Christian understanding of the atonement.

Green and Baker suggest that although the conflict-victory motif is common in the atonement writings of the 2nd to 4th centuries, it is written about in different ways and with a variety of images and metaphors of the atonement. Two of the main descriptions of the atonement that developed within the *Christus Victor* framework during this time period are: 1) *Christus Victor as Recapitulation*; and, 2) *Christus Victor as Ransom*.

Green and Baker (2000:119) describe the recapitulation theme as being a strong motif in the writings of Irenaeus (ca. 130-202). He wrote in a social context that was witnessing the proliferation of Gnostic ideas and sects. Irenaeus contested the Gnostic notion that physical matter was the root problem of evil and that humans could escape their corrupted state through knowledge. He taught that the root of humanity’s corrupted state was a wilful action by Adam and Eve, but

²³ Originally published in 1931.

salvation can be found in Jesus Christ on the basis of his victory as the second Adam ... “Adam was the originator of a disobedient race, and Christ inaugurated a new redeemed humanity.” Christ both resists and conquers the devil by his representative obedience where the human Adam could not and as such secures and effects salvation. Jesus recapitulates Adam’s life and therefore the life of all people, undoing the sin and death Adam passed on to them (McKnight 2008).

The ransom theme, according to Green and Baker (2000:121-123) focused primarily on the Scripture stating that Christ’s life was given as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). It was Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254) who first developed a detailed theory that suggested the recipient of Christ’s ransom payment was in fact the devil in satisfaction of his claims on the souls of humanity as a result of Adam and Eve’s having sold them into slavery to him at the Fall. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330-395) is the other major name from roughly the same time period that is associated with this position. Although they differ slightly in their portrayal of the theme, essentially, they hold to a position that sees God agreeing to offer Jesus as the just ransom payment in exchange for the release of those held in captivity to the bondage of death and sin; and the devil (to his surprise) finding himself unable to continue to hold Jesus as a result of His divine goodness. Instead Christ breaks free in resurrection leaving the devil in a position of having lost both his ransom payment and his prisoners.

For Aulén (1931:4-5), however, the true significance and focus of their work is not to be found in their concern with who received the ransom payment, but rather in the motif of the liberation of humanity from the bondage of sin, death and the devil.

The primary issue is not that of a business transaction, but rather that of an act of rescue and liberation. He describes the central theme of the Christus Victor view as (ibid.):

...the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ – Christus Victor – fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself ... God is pictured as in Christ carrying through a victorious conflict against powers of evil which are hostile to His will. This constitutes Atonement, because the drama is a cosmic drama, and the victory over the hostile powers brings to pass a new relation, a relation of reconciliation, between God and the world...

Aulén’s book has been instrumental in the current popular recovery of this view amongst ECM proponents and friends of the ECM. Greg Boyd is a current and influential²⁴ example of this trend. For Boyd, Jesus’ death, resurrection, life and teachings all revolve around the same theme – overcoming evil with good. I.e. “...establishing the loving reign of God while vanquishing the powers that resist it” (www.gregboyd.org). He (ibid.) writes:

In the Christus Victor view, Jesus died as our substitute and bore our sin and guilt by voluntarily experiencing the full force of the rebel kingdom we have all allowed to reign on the earth. To save us, he experienced the full consequences of sin that we otherwise would have experienced. In so doing, he broke open the gates of hell, destroyed the power of sin, erased the law that stood against us, and thereby freed us to receive the Holy Spirit and walk in right relatedness with God.

The Christus Victor view as expressed by Boyd (and consistent with most current popular renditions thereof) shares Aulén’s departure from a controlling focus on the answer to the question of who the ransom payment was in fact made to. Boyd (ibid.) goes on to state:

So too, the Christus Victor model can wholeheartedly affirm that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, but without supposing that Jesus literally had to buy off either God or the devil (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28; cf. I Tim. 2:6; Heb 9:15).

²⁴ Boyd is the founder of Christus Victor Ministries and has been invited by Emergent Village as well as Rob Bell’s Mars Hill Church to preach and teach specifically on this topic.

The word “ransom” simply means “the price of release” and was most commonly used when purchasing slaves from the slave market. (18) Hence, the Christus Victor model can simply take this to mean that Christ did whatever it took to release us from slavery to the powers, and this he did by become incarnate, living an outrageously loving life in defiance of the powers, freeing people from the oppression of the devil through healings and exorcisms, teaching the way of self-sacrificial love, and most definitively by his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection.

It is this understanding of the person and work of Christ that provides the context for properly understanding the ECM’s perception of the Kingdom He established and subsequently calls the Church to be part of.

4.3.3. The Nature of the Kingdom

For Boyd, the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ, because In Christ, the Kingdom of Satan has been finally defeated. Wright (2008b) views the situation in a similar light: “The gospels tell the story of God’s Kingdom being launched on earth as in heaven, generating a new state of affairs in which the power of evil has been decisively defeated, the new creation has been decisively launched...”

Goheen (2005:1) interprets Jesus’ proclamation, “The Kingdom of God is at hand”, as the breaking-in of God’s kingdom into human history. It is the good news and announcement that “God’s healing power was invading history in Jesus and by the Spirit to restore the whole creation again to live under the gracious rule of God.” He observes four characteristics of this gospel:

First, it is a redirecting power. By this Goheen (ibid.) means that the Gospel is not primarily a doctrine or a worldview but “the renewing power of God unto salvation”

– it is God’s redemptive reign. The gospel, as the instrument of God’s Spirit, has the power to produce the life of the kingdom.

Second, the gospel is restorative. It is about the restoration and renewal of all creation from the sin that has defiled it. Goheen (2005:2) criticises an understanding of redemption present in Western history that portrays it as salvation *from* creation as opposed to the salvation *of* creation.

Third, the gospel is comprehensive in its scope. It is not just limited to humanity or human souls. The gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of the reign of God over all creation – it is all encompassing. Jesus embodied, announced and accomplished a salvation that “restores all of life by His Spirit to again live under His [God’s] authority and Word” (ibid.).

Fourth, as has already been shown quite significantly, the gospel is the fulfilment of the Old Testament narrative. Jesus steps into a context and climate of Jewish expectation that anticipated the climax and ending of the long story of God’s redemptive acts. Jesus describes himself as the goal of this redemptive story while at the same time points forward to a climactic end that must still come²⁵ (ibid.).

Quoting 2 Cor. 5:17&19²⁶ and 1 Cor. 15:23-24,²⁷ Hunsberger (1998:91) states:

²⁵ Acts 1:6-7

²⁶ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-19, NIV).

²⁷ For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (1 Cor. 15:23-24, NIV).

Ruling by way of a cross and a resurrection, God thwarts the powers of sin and death that distort the creation once good at its beginning. The future rule of God breaks in ahead of time as a harbinger of the world's future to be fully and finally reconciled to God.

Hunsberger (ibid. p.86) describes Jesus' announcement that the reign of God was at hand as being eschatological in character, which by His coming, death and resurrection effectively pulled back the veil on the coming reign of God revealing the horizon of the world's future.

In this sense, Ray Anderson (2006:97-98), standing on the foundation of Ladd's "now-but-not-yet" kingdom tension, speaks of the kingdom of God as having both a present and future dimension. The coming of the kingdom for which Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the Lord's prayer was that God's will might be done on earth, i.e. that God's rule might be perfectly realised on earth now (Matthew 6:10). Jesus' answer to the disciples' question as to when the kingdom would finally come was that the kingdom was already in their midst but in an unexpected form (Luke 17:20) – "The signs of the kingdom were not to be found in the political realm but in the spiritual rule of the Messiah over evil, and supernatural powers such as disease, demons and even death" (ibid.). This was possible because by bringing all the powers and evils under divine judgement through his death and resurrection Jesus secured victory and healing. The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was "the eschatological inauguration of the new age and the seal and promise of salvation" (ibid., p.98). Wright (2006a:98) interprets the stories of Christ's resurrection in the Gospels and Acts as testifying to the fact that: "If Jesus has been raised, that means that God's new world, God's kingdom, has indeed arrived." Gibbs and Bolger (2005:47) speak of Christ both announcing and

inaugurating the reign of God on earth and, together with the giving of the Holy Spirit, establishing in provisional form this long-promised kingdom.

4.3.4. The Church and the Kingdom

The ECM's response to this New Kingdom reality that has been birthed is to fully realise the role that the Church has been called to play as a result. It is against this backdrop of what the ECM understands Christ to have accomplished by His death and resurrection that the language of participating in the still unfolding fifth act of the drama of Scripture begins to take on a new depth. The ECM identifies three important kingdom roles that church is called to fulfil in light of the kingdom ministry of Christ. These are:

a. To proclaim Christ's Lordship over all and His victory over evil

Wright (2008b:227) asks the question: "What is it we are announcing when we evangelize?" his answer: "It is the good news that God (the world's creator) is at last becoming king and that Jesus, whom this God raised from the dead, is the world's true lord" and that "...God is God, that Jesus is Lord, that the powers of evil have been defeated, that God's new world has begun."

Hunsberger (1998:97), also in the context of evangelism, speaks of the church responding to the common hunger in the hearts of people for "a God who reigns in love and intends the good of the whole earth" with the testimony that "they have heard the announcement that such a reign is coming, and indeed is already

breaking into the world.” Their testimony is that this reign is not only coming, but in Jesus, they have been invited and welcomed into receiving it for themselves. As those who have been welcomed and invited, they continue in the task of welcoming and inviting others to experience the same. In this regard, the church “offer[s] itself to assist their entrance into the reign of God and to travel with them as co-pilgrims” (ibid.). The call to receive and enter the kingdom is a call for people to turn from other hopes and loyalties and their rejections of God’s rule in their lives and to find their hope in the one true God.

b. A present foretaste and sign of the coming Kingdom

For the ECM, a true proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom cannot exist only in word. Kingdom deeds are vital. Mark Scandrette speaks of an ‘inhabited apologetic’ in that Christians bear witness to the reality of God through their lives. Their daily lives are the vehicles through which they preach the good news of the kingdom because it’s their daily lives that point to the reality of the kingdom (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005:58-59).

Hunsberger (1998:86), in reference to Hans Küng, describes the church as “an eschatological community of salvation”. By this he means that a church founded and rooted in its message of the good news of the reign of God, practically lives with the reign of God as its goal moving towards its revealed consummation. He sates, “The church is defined by its origins in a gospel that casts a vision of its destiny that always draws it forward.”

However, the distinction between the church and the kingdom is important and needs to be maintained; the church is not to be equated with the reign of God. Hunsberger (ibid., p.98) describes the church as “a messianic community both spawned by the reign of God and directed towards it.” But at the same time, their link is vital because the church is made up of the recipients of the divine reign. As such their communal life is to manifest the presence and characteristics of God’s reign as its sign and foretaste (ibid., p.99,101). Gibbs and Bolger (2005:47) speak of ECM communities striving “to become servants and signs of that kingdom as they live God’s future which is both already here and remains to come.” Hunsberger (1998:102) makes the point that although the kingdom reign of God is hidden, the church, by its very existence, brings it into the world’s view as a sign and into its experience as a foretaste of what is to finally come. Barret (1998:117) suggests that as the church refuses to be controlled by the idolatrous powers of the world and shapes its life and ministry around Jesus Christ and the life of the age to come, the church demonstrates the reality of what it proclaims.

c. A present agent and instrument of the Kingdom

Hunsberger (1998:101) suggests that the word ‘represent’ can be used in both a passive as well as an active sense.²⁸ If its function as sign and foretaste gives expression to its passive form, its calling in the active sense of the word is best understood as that of ‘agent’ or ‘instrument’ of the kingdom. “The church bears the

²⁸ “The passive meaning indicates that one thing stands for another. When you have seen the one, you have known the other ... In contrast, the active meaning of *represent* indicates the way a person may be given authority to act on another’s behalf or to care for another’s interests” (1998:101).

divine reign's authority ... and engages in the divine reign's action"²⁹ (ibid.). This is part of what is implied by the New Testament's description of Christians as co-workers with Christ for the kingdom of God³⁰ and ambassadors for Christ in the sense of an embassy³¹

Wright (2006:79) states:

With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once for all ... We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God's rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we have access ... we are all invited – summoned, actually – to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as it is in heaven.

Wright speaks of the fact that God's kingdom is being launched on earth as it is in heaven. He (2008b:201) states:

... the power of evil has been decisively defeated, the new creation has been decisively launched, and Jesus' followers have been commissioned and equipped to put that victory and that inaugurated new world into practice. Heaven's rule, God's rule, is thus to be put into practice in the world, resulting in salvation in both the present and the future, a salvation that is both for humans and, through saved humans, for the wider world. This is the solid basis for the mission of the church.

Similarly, Barret (1998:113) speaks of a situation where if the church truly understands and embraces its apostolic calling, "it must see itself as participating in God's victory over evil."

Although the EV doesn't speak on behalf of the entire ECM, its vision statement provides an important indication as to the importance of this point for its

²⁹ Matt. 16:19, John 20:19-23

³⁰ Col. 4:11

³¹ 2 Cor. 5:20

understanding of its mission. The EV describes its vision (or “dream” as they refer to it) as follows:

Our dream is to join in the activity of God in the world wherever we are able, partnering with God as God’s dreams for our world come true. In the process, the world can be healed and changed, and so can we.

There is a strong sense that although the church embodies the divine reign, it, in a sense, exists for the world, because the *missio Dei* is understood to be taking place in the world. God is at work bringing redemption to all of creation, in effect bringing the application of Christ’s victorious work to bear on all that continues feel the effects of the evil that has been conquered. Gibbs & Bolger (2005:52) describe the church’s role as not being that of taking God to these places, but instead “to find God where he is working and to participate in redemption...”

For the ECM, redemption is seen in a broad and holistic light. Bartholomew & Goheen (nd:6-7) see the mission as being as broad as the rule of Jesus and therefore extending to all creation. Gibbs & Bolger (2005:63) lay the situation out very plainly in the following statement: “The gospel of emerging churches is not confined to personal salvation. It is social transformation arising from the presence and permeation of the reign of Christ.” Frost and Hirsch (2003:115) describe kingdom orientated churches as operating in the tension of knowing that complete earthly shalom will only accompany the second coming of Jesus but at the same time holding to a conviction that “in God’s economy our actions do have an eternal impact. We do extend the kingdom of God in daily affairs and activities and actions done in the name of Jesus.” Wright (2008b:207), speaking of the same situation, prefers to use the language of “building for the kingdom.”

4.3.5. The Kingdom-shaped Church

This pathway to the ECM's current understanding of the church's mission in the world has taken place on two levels: firstly, a dismantling and reconstructing of the Christian understanding of its mission and the gospel/kingdom of God; and secondly, a dismantling and reconstructing of all aspects of life and church practices in a way that is consistent with their understanding of the mission/kingdom of God. Gibbs and Bolger (2005:96) state: "They understand that the kingdom gives rise to the church, not the other way around" and "Utilizing the kingdom of God paradigm as a tool of deconstruction, emerging churches dismantle many forms of church that, although viable at one time, increasingly represent a bygone era." The ECM proposes a shift in emphasis from a "church" to a "kingdom" focus.

Illustrative of this fundamental difference is Gibbs and Bolger's quote of Mark Scandrette from ReIMAGINE! in San Francisco (2005:49):

We got the questions wrong. We started out thinking about what *form* the church should take, as opposed to what the life of Jesus means in this time and place. Now, instead of being preoccupied with new forms of church, we focus on seeking the kingdom as the people of God.

It is against this background that Gibbs & Bolger's definition of the ECM as churches that *practice the way of Jesus* in postmodern contexts, can be properly understood. Their extensive research on the ECM has lead them to identify nine practices or patterns exhibited by emerging churches which serve well to explain the outworking of this intention in practice. They state (ibid. pp.45):

Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities,

they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.

1) Emerging churches identify with the life of Christ by embracing His gospel of the coming kingdom of God and responding positively to God's invitation to participate with Him in the redemption of the world (ibid. pp.63-64).

2) Emerging churches transform the secular realm by creating a whole-life spirituality that addresses all of life and breaks down modernity's secular-sacred divide. The ECM values the interaction of kingdom and culture and mind-set that all of life is sacred intentionally tearing down church practices that foster the perpetuation of the idea that there are secular spaces, times, or activities. All things can be made holy and given to God in worship. Modern dualisms are no longer binding (ibid., pp.65-67,88).

3) Emerging churches live highly communal lives believing that relationships give rise to gatherings and not the other way around. The focus is on a people, not a place, and on a community rather than a meeting. The commitment is to a family, not an institution. Meetings support the life of the community; they do not create the community. Communalism replaces individualistic consumerism. Identification with Christ is also an identification with His community of followers (ibid. pp.89,97-100).

4) Emerging churches welcome the stranger by displaying the hospitality of Christ in welcoming the outcast and those who are different. They believe in ministries of inclusion which serve as safe spaces for anyone that God brings to them,

regardless of “gender, race, doubts, disabilities, depression, or orientation” (ibid. p.121).

5) Emerging churches serve with generosity, emphasising ministry to the needs of its surrounding community and the world, rather than a primary focus on its own members. They are free to do this because their structures don't see them overloaded with commitments and responsibilities necessary to running programs, building maintenance and paying staff salaries. They also seek to proclaim Christ from a position of respect and concern for the whole person. They ask the question of what constitutes good news to the person to whom they are ministering in terms of his/her whole life situation (ibid. pp.152-153).

6) Emerging churches participate as producers by demonstrating a high level of participation in their worship gatherings. Worship occurs in many styles, ancient and modern, but focuses on intentionality and the need to provide a context that enables the entire congregation to be both actively and creatively engaged in the act of offering worship. There are no spectators in the kingdom of God (ibid. pp.172,236).

7) Emerging churches create as created beings by joining the Creator in His re-creating activity. Gibbs & Bolger (ibid., p.174) state: “Re-creation within the reign of Christ seeks to respect and restore the goodness and beauty of God's creation.” Creative beauty in all its forms – nature, music, art, etc. - is celebrated and offered as worship to the Creator.

8) Emerging churches lead as a body by valuing leadership that embodies the servant model of Jesus himself. This is a leadership that doesn't serve to enhance the power and prestige of a few but instead benefits, equips and empowers those who are led. Gibbs and Bolger (ibid. p.215) state: "The key idea is that leaders emerge based on the activity at hand and are not the sole leaders of a group. All are welcome at the leadership table." The principle of the priesthood of all believers is highly valued. Hierarchical and controlling models are avoided.

9) Emerging churches take part in spiritual activities and value the importance of experiential encounters with God which result in lives that are changing and gaining depth. This cannot be manufactured or programmed. Spiritual disciplines from a variety of traditions are learned and explored together (ibid. p.234).

4.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the theological roots of the ECM's understanding of its missional identity. It was seen how situations of transition necessitate the re-examination of what one's primary mission and calling are before one can adequately answer the questions of how to implement the mission in the new context.

As a result, the ECM finds itself working through a gradual process of dismantling and reconstructing as they reflect on the meaning of the gospel as they see it expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and His interpretation of the Old Testament narrative. Their observations lead them to the conclusion that it is not

just the methods of the Christianity arising out of Christendom and modernity that need to change, but in fact its message too.

For the ECM, the modern Reformation based Protestant understanding of the Gospel, which sees Jesus' ministry almost entirely in terms of dying on the cross to forgive sins so that people can go to heaven one day, as being a reduction of the full Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed and effected by Jesus Christ. Instead, read in deep integration with the narrative of the Old Testament, it is clear for the ECM that God's mission in the world is His great and gracious act of making new all that has been corrupted by sin and evil. By virtue of promises made to Abraham, Israel emerges as the nation through whom God will bring final healing, restoration and justice to all nations. This final shalom will accompany the reign of the Messiah and will be received by all who respond to His invitation to find it there. Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, exhausts the powers of evil thus liberating creation from the chains that once held it, and establishing in provisional form His kingdom rule that awaits full and final consummation at His second coming. Until then, the church lives as the visible expression of His perfect reign as its sign and foretaste, agent and instrument.

The ECM, by its own admission, departs from traditional Evangelicalism in its claim that it is not only the methods but the message of the church too that needs revision. Because the ECM, in its literature and practice, is having an influence within the Evangelical church, it is important that clarity is reached regarding its points of harmony and departure with the Evangelical church. This will serve to provide both a critique of some of the elements of the Evangelical church that can

be positively influenced by the ECM, as well as those that threaten its very identity and biblical conscience. It is to these matters that chapter 5 will be devoted.

CHAPTER 5

THE ECM AND EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

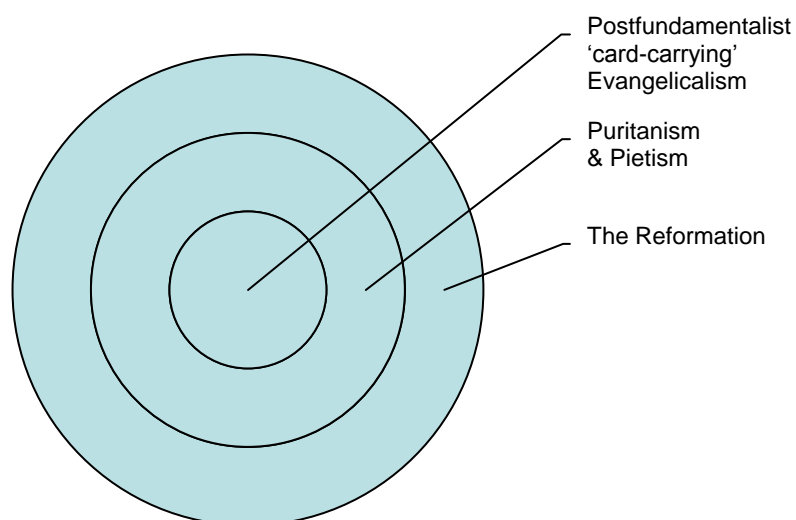
The purpose of this chapter is to provide a basic description of Evangelicalism by means of a consideration of its historical and theological development. It will show the vital link between Evangelical identity and Evangelical theology as well as some of the more recent challenges to its traditional positions in the form of post-conservative evangelical theology. This paper will identify the presence of an identifiable core of Evangelical theology and suggest that for all the different manifestations of Evangelicalism that might exist at present, it is against this core body of theology that new theological emphases and variations must be evaluated if clarity is to be attained regarding Evangelicalism's current state and the implications thereof for its future.

The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to a comparative analysis of the theology of the ECM, as represented by Brian McLaren and Dan Kimball, with historical Evangelicalism in terms of the particular subject under examination in this paper – its missional ecclesiology. The comparative analysis will first present historical Evangelicalism's position on the theological themes which the previous chapter has shown to be significant in the ECM's missional ecclesiology – the mission and kingdom of God, the nature of salvation, and the task of the church in the world. Thereafter, the positions of Brian McLaren, a notable speaker and author associated with Emergent Village, and Dan Kimball, an author and pastor

representing one of the more conservative voices in the Emerging Church, will be presented on the same issues.

5.1. The Historical Development of Evangelicalism

Current day Evangelicalism needs to be understood in terms of its own historical development and context. Grenz (1993:22-25) suggests that when Evangelicalism is defined in terms of the history of theology it is generally regarded as having arisen through a series of three historical waves: the Reformation, Puritanism/Pietism, and Postfundamentalist 'card-carrying' Evangelicalism. These three waves can also be seen as three concentric circles, an image which serves to depict the narrowing of the term that accompanied its historical development.



According to Grenz (1993:22-23), the first and outer concentric circle depicts the churches that came out of the German Reformation in the 16th century. In an attempt to maintain their separation from Roman Catholicism and in order to highlight Luther's gospel emphasis, they adopted the name *evangelisch* (evangelical). It is the Reformation's emphasis on biblical doctrine and authority, as well as personal salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith alone, as expressed in its great *solas* (*sola scriptura, solus Christus, sola gratia, sola fide, soli Deo Gloria*) that would form the essence of the developing Evangelical identity. Bock (2002:42), in agreement with Grenz's analysis, states, "the roots of the term *evangelical* are those of the Reformation."

Wells (2006:14) identifies the common commitment to this core body of doctrine as the centre that has held Evangelicals together, given them their agenda and, in fact, defined them. These beliefs have of course been held alongside numerous other differing beliefs and doctrines (e.g. church government, baptism, eschatology, etc.) which are commonly designated as occupying a secondary place in terms of necessity and importance. As a result, Evangelicalism has been able to exist and function throughout the different stages of its historical development as a broad and diverse movement while at the same time managing to maintain a strong sense of cohesion, coherence and direction.

The second, narrower circle is that of the Evangelicalism that arose out of English Puritanism and Continental Lutheran Pietism, particularly in its American revivalist expression during the Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. Grenz (1993:23-24) maintains that in addition to holding firmly to its Reformation heritage,

the Evangelicalism arising out of this historical and social context exhibited a much stronger emphasis on the personal conscious experience of the grace of God in the individual's conversion experience. This developed, according to Dorrien (1998:5), as a result of the spiritual coldness and questionable morality that accompanied the highly forensic doctrinal orthodoxy that arose out of the early post-Reformation Protestantism which, in its rigorous working out of the doctrines of justification and the sovereignty of God, had largely neglected the biblical themes of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. A new breed of Evangelicalism, with a stronger emphasis on the themes of holiness, good news and the new life of the Spirit, began to take shape under the influence of figures like the English Puritan, William Ames (1576-1633), the German, Pietist Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705), as well as John Wesley and George Whitefield in the revivalist awakenings of the 1700's in England and America. Erikson (1997:7) makes note of the strong concern for social justice and education that accompanied this new movement as evidenced in the role played by the Christian community in opposing the practice of slavery and in the founding of significant higher education institutions like Princeton, Brown and Dartmouth.

Despite all its development during the 1700's, Grenz (1993:24) identifies the subsequent century as the actual heyday of the movement. The 1800's saw Evangelicals dominate the religious establishment as well as the national ethos of the United States. With no state church and no one particular church dominating the Christian landscape, the 19th century also witnessed the rise of denominationalism in the American church, an arrangement which saw the different Protestant church groups and traditions able to maintain their distinctives

while at the same time being able to relate to each other as co-participants in their work on behalf of the kingdom.

Despite its growth during the 19th century, Dorrien (1998:6) identifies a concurrent societal shift that was underway with the advent of modern consciousness and the rise of biblical source criticism, early form criticism and Darwinian evolutionary theory, that would pose a serious challenge to conservative Protestantism. Hunter (1987:20) speaks of the split of Protestantism, as two distinct strategies for dealing with these changes emerged. Whereas liberalism adjusted its religious and theological views to account for the discoveries and thought that marked the period, conservative Protestantism opted for a stance of resistance as it sought to defend and strengthen its theological boundaries. According to Grenz (1993:25) this would become known as the modernist-fundamentalist controversy.

The issue of the authority of Scripture would come under fierce scrutiny and conservative Protestantism was forced to defend its traditional claims regarding the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture in terms that were acceptable to its modern context. It is in this sense that Dorrien (1998:6) speaks of the rise of what became known as Fundamentalist Evangelicalism as a by-product of the rise of modern historical consciousness. Fundamentalist Evangelicalism denied that Biblical authority could be secured apart from an affirmation of biblical inerrancy and, according to Grenz (1993:25), in a series of twelve tracts, known as *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, distilled the various points of the controversy. In 1910 the Presbyterian General Assembly settled on a list of essential non-negotiable doctrines – the inerrancy of Scripture; the virgin birth of

Christ; the substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of Christ; and the authenticity of biblical miracles.

Erickson (1997:9-10) notes the gradual change of the nature of Fundamentalism over time. Whereas its initial focus had been the affirmation of and argumentation for fundamental doctrines, over time it began to display a much stronger preoccupation with the criticism and rebuttal of liberal theology. Fundamentalists identified liberal theologians as having substituted the biblical gospel with a social gospel that focused on the transformation of social structures as the key to combating evil in society, as opposed to the traditional gospel of “personal regeneration through faith in Christ and acceptance of his atoning work.” A significant narrowing of the evangelical position resulted as the personal aspect of salvation was emphasised at the expense of the social application of the gospel - something that had been a strong characteristic of the evangelicalism of the 19th century and before.

Despite their attempts to overcome the threat of liberalism in their denominations and learning institutions, Fundamentalism found itself in a gradual, yet definite decline. Erikson (1997:11-13) reports that In 1926 the Presbyterian denomination elected its first liberal moderator, a sure sign that the balance of power had shifted from the Fundamentalists to the Liberals. A similar shift would also take place in the leadership and governance at the Presbyterian denomination’s premier seminary, Princeton, with the result that notable Evangelical scholars such as J. Gresham Machen would eventually withdraw from the seminary and found a new school, Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia), to carry on the tradition of orthodox

scholarship. This pattern of defeat and withdrawal by the fundamentalists became a familiar story in many of the mainstream denominations. Surprisingly, however, these developments would not spell the end of fundamentalism, as statistics show the remarkable growth of the fundamentalist churches in comparison to the liberal churches when factors like church membership, volunteers for the ministry, and per capita giving were considered (ibid.).

The third and innermost concentric circle of Postfundamentalist 'card-carrying' Evangelicalism represents the development of Evangelicalism during the 20th century, particularly that arising from the aftermath of World War II. Dorrien (1998:7) references the work of Evangelical leaders like Carl F.H. Henry and Edward J. Carnell as representative of a new breed of Evangelical thinkers and academics committed to the task of reforming American Fundamentalism and rehabilitating its intellectual foundations. While critical of Fundamentalism's millennialist apocalypticism and separatist ecclesiology, they embraced the classical Protestantism of the Reformed Puritan tradition in a way that "interpreted this heritage through the lens of the ongoing fundamentalist battle against modernism" (ibid.). Together with Harold J. Ockenga and other founders of Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) they adopted the term *neoevangelicalism*, which was later shortened to *Evangelicalism*. Erickson (1997:14) also highlights the significance of the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, which emerged as a national voice for conservative Christianity and a rival to the more liberal National Council of Churches without the negativism of the American Council of Churches.

Grenz (1993:26) describes the Evangelicalism of the 20th century as “a movement of conservative Christians that grew out of the earlier fundamentalism” and thus defined, as “a group of believers who consciously seek to stand between liberalism and fundamentalism.” He describes them as occupying this middle ground in the sense that while remaining totally committed to the basic doctrines of Christian orthodoxy and still critical of Liberal theology’s accommodation to the modern, Enlightenment mentality, they display a greater openness to engagement with the world and dialogue with other perspectives.

Grenz (1993:27) identifies seven crucial areas of focus that reflect the intent of the original *card-carrying* Evangelicals in their attempts to make up for some of the perceived deficiencies of their Fundamentalist heritage. They include:

... the development of a new social ethic; the setting forth of an intellectually credible Christian apologetic; a bold thrust in evangelism; the founding of institutions promoting education and scholarship; and transdenominational cooperation based on a sensed underlying spiritual unity.

Donald Bloesch (1993:29) highlights the movement’s commitment to theological orthodoxy and sets forth what he perceives the hallmarks of Evangelical Christianity to be as: the sovereignty of God; the divine authority of Scripture; total depravity; Christ’s substitutionary atonement; salvation by grace; salvation through faith alone; the primacy of proclamation; scriptural holiness; the spiritual mission of the church and the personal return of Christ.

Grenz (1993:27) observes that as the third quarter of the century began to unfold it appeared as if evangelicals were successfully achieving their goals. Evangelical apologists and student ministries were active across the university campuses of

the USA, a strong commitment to evangelism, as evidenced by the rise in large-scale crusade evangelistic events such as those of Billy Graham as well as the Lausanne conferences, was evident, and Evangelical educational institutions were thriving.

Although the initial work by people such as Henry, Carnell and Ockenga would provide the movement with a foundation that would yield significant growth and impetus, Dorrien (1998:7) observes that the self-critical process they began would unwittingly lead Evangelical theology beyond the boundaries of its Fundamentalist heritage and concerns. Dorrien (ibid.) states:

By drawing attention to some of the unexamined cultural and philosophical presuppositions that American fundamentalism typically assigned to biblical faith, the first neoevangelicals opened the door to critical evangelical perspectives that undermined their own doctrinal fundamentalism.

Erickson (1997:16f) comments extensively on the rise of the leftist position within the Evangelical camp. Whereas the leaders of the movement were settled and comfortable in terms of the extent to which they had distanced themselves from their Fundamentalist forbears, there were many amongst its younger ranks who felt that they had not gone far enough. Erickson (ibid.) identifies the 1st of December, 1962 - "Black Saturday" – as a significant moment in marking the emerging divergence beginning to appear in Evangelicalism. Daniel Fuller, son of the founder and dean-elect of Fuller Theological Seminary, chose to address the issue of biblical inerrancy in his address at the faculty's ten-year planning retreat.

Erickson (1997:17) states:

He contended there were errors in the Bible that could not be accounted as copyists' errors. He suggested instead that the Bible was fully truthful and free from all error when referring to revelational or doctrinal matters,

matters pertaining to salvation, but that it was not inerrant in matters of science and history.

Erickson (1997:17-19) comments on a continued leftward movement of some Evangelicals and references James Davison Hunter's survey of faculty and students at nine Evangelical liberal arts colleges and seven Evangelical seminaries in the 1980's which showed a "considerably increased openness on the part of these young evangelicals to views previously associated with more liberal movements." Dorrien (1998:7) notes the influence of Karl Barth and other neo-orthodox theologians on the rethinking of Christian faith apart from the counter-modernist philosophical assumptions of traditional Evangelicalism that was beginning to take place amongst the growing Evangelical left.

Roger Olsen (<http://www.religion-online.org>), in an attempt at the time to provide some clarity on the characteristics of this new post-conservative Evangelicalism noted the following in his May 1995 *Christian Century* article on the topic:

- Post-conservatives can be understood in a similar light to post-liberals – both represent a posture adopted by its theologians that sees themselves moving beyond their liberal or conservative heritage while maintaining some of its qualities. In this sense, post-conservatives display a continued commitment to the Evangelical tenets of the importance of a new-birth experience (conversionism), the authority of Scripture (biblicism), sharing the faith, and the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, but no longer feel the burden to fervently defend these orthodoxies against the attack of modernism.

- Post-conservatives are eager to engage in dialogue with non-evangelical theologians.
- Post-conservatives are concerned about theology's domination by white males and Euro-centrism and seek to encourage the perspectives of non-white, female and Third World theologians.
- Post-conservatives seek to "broaden the sources used in theology" based on the conviction that the essence of Christianity and theology is not "propositional truths enshrined in doctrines but a narrative-shaped experience." These sources include the Bible, Christian tradition, culture, and the contemporary experience of the Christian community.
- Post-conservatives express discontent with Evangelical theology's ties to the Enlightenment and commonsense realism, preferring instead various forms of critical realism. Most do reject ontological relativism as being "incompatible with the gospel in any culture."
- Post-conservatives prefer to view Scripture holistically considering it to be inspired as a canon of writings and not as "bits and pieces of infallible information communicated to individual authors."
- Post-conservatives increasingly favour an open view of God. This view sees God as historical and as one who limits Himself and enters into relationships of response to humans as opposed to the all-determining controller of history, untouched by time and change.
- Post-conservatives advocate a view of nature and grace, influenced by the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, which sees nature as fallen but never abandoned by grace. As a result they exhibit a strong

ecological activism, regarding themselves as “created co-creators with God, caring for creation on the way to its final redemption.”

- Post-conservatives tend to adopt a more inclusivist view of salvation, believing that God always leaves Himself with a witness in nature and culture that is able to bring people to an experience of salvation through Christ, even if they might never have heard of Christ.
- Post-conservatives emphasise the humanity of Christ.
- Post-conservatives favour a more synergistic Armenian understanding of salvation.
- Post-conservatives reject triumphalism with regards to theological truth claims and favour a posture of humility and modesty believing that God is always able to reveal more from His Word than has been previously apprehended.

When surveying the Evangelical landscape as it exists in academia it is clear that two distinct factions have emerged – the conservative and post-conservative positions. When looking more broadly at Evangelicalism as it exists in the churches, Wells (2006:15f) observes three main constituencies making up its ranks:

The first holds firmly to the historical doctrines of the Reformation and Evangelicalism and formulates its ecclesiology and self-understanding around the gospel of unworthy sinners redeemed and forgiven through the gracious gift of God’s righteousness given in the form of Christ’s penal substitution on their behalf and received by the empty hand of faith.

The second represents the explosion of the church growth movement during the latter part of the 20th century, which adopted a pragmatic entrepreneurial approach that sought to reconfigure their churches around proven business and marketing strategies. Although not necessarily denying Reformational understanding overtly, heavy doctrines that were not considered attractive to seekers and that might be a potential impediment to church growth were practically treated as superfluous and took a low profile in the life of the church. Chronologically, Wells (ibid.) lists this constituency second on his list but regards it as the most dominant constituency in American Evangelicalism today.

The third, the Emergent/Emerging church, is a reaction to both the first two constituencies and represents a practical ecclesiological expression of the post-conservative theology which has played a significant part in its theological and philosophical formulation. Wells (ibid.) describes the ECM as “thumbing its nose at both of these first two constituencies, in the one case because it’s orthodoxy is too confining and in the other because its church life, glitzy as it may be, is too empty.”

Although Wells identifies these three distinct constituencies within the Evangelical church today, in practice the boundaries separating these groups are vague with the influences of each often observable in various degrees in individual congregations. What is clear, however, is that Evangelicalism is presently experiencing something of an identity crisis. Dorrien (1998:7-8) asks some pertinent questions in this regard:

- “How far can evangelicals appropriate neoorthodox, liberationist, and postmodern modes of thought and remain evangelical?”

- “Is evangelicalism necessarily a movement that proclaims the primacy of particular doctrines about scripture and salvation?”
- “If the question of biblical authority can be opened up in evangelical theology, what about the doctrines of God and salvation?”

Whereas Evangelicalism, for most of its existence, has been fighting a battle over orthodoxy outside its walls, it now finds itself in a new position where the debate rages within. Bartholomew (2004:12-13) describes Evangelicalism in the West as presently being at a crossroads. From the author of this paper’s perspective, at least two possible outcomes exist. There will either be reformation with the result that a new unified Evangelicalism will take its place as witness in this new postmodern world, or the rift will widen with the re-emergence of a renewed Evangelicalism committed to the core concerns of its historical heritage and post-conservative theology replacing the liberal theology of modernism as its new threat. The latter seems more likely.

There is a feeling amongst many in the current post-conservative camp that the questions Dorrien poses can certainly be answered in the affirmative, i.e. that the essence of Evangelicalism is not restricted to a doctrinal stance on scripture and salvation. Grenz argues that a definition of Evangelicalism on such terms alone is too restrictive and not a fair representation of the movement as a whole. For Grenz (1993:33) *Evangelical* refers to “a specific vision of what it means to be Christian.” He states (ibid.):

This vision includes a fervent desire to make the Bible alive in personal and community life, a sense that faith is to be vibrant and central to life, a way of praying, an understanding of the church as a fellowship of believers, and

a desire to express our joy and praise through vehicles of worship and testimony.

Most importantly though for Grenz is the common understanding evangelicals have of their lives in terms of a life narrative – a narrative that tells the story of once having been lost but of having come to a place of new life through an encounter with the God of the Bible as revealed in Jesus Christ (ibid.).

Although each of these elements are significant aspects of Evangelical identity and practice, it is surely short-sighted to neglect in one's definition that which has consistently been at the heart of Evangelicalism since its root stages in the Protestant Reformation, and that which lays the foundation for and shapes the experiences and understandings Grenz refers to – Evangelicalism has always been a theological movement thoroughly committed to biblical faithfulness and orthodoxy. Hunter (1988:19) points out that the Protestant Reformation was essentially a theological protest that established a precedent, making the “articulation and rearticulation of the substance of Protestant belief ... the paramount task of the Protestant community.” From Hunter's perspective, Protestantism has always been concerned with distinguishing itself from Roman Catholicism and other religions, primarily on the basis of its theological tenets. This was even more true for Evangelicalism as it sought to distinguish itself, not only from other religions, but from theological Liberalism too.

Evangelicalism then, logically understood, cannot be defined apart from the doctrines that have made up its core identity since its seed form in the Protestant Reformation. On this basis, without downplaying the difficulties present in defining

Evangelicalism absolutely, there does exist a historically identifiable core Evangelical theology. For all the different manifestations of Evangelicalism that might exist at present, it is against this core body of theology that new theological emphases and variations must be evaluated if clarity is to be attained regarding Evangelicalism's current state and the implications thereof for its future.

For this reason, the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a comparative analysis of the theology of historical Evangelicalism and the ECM, as represented by Brian McLaren and Dan Kimball in terms of the particular subject under examination in this paper – its missional ecclesiology. The comparative analysis that follows will consider the theological themes which the previous chapters have shown to be significant in the ECM's missional ecclesiology – The mission and kingdom of God, the nature of salvation, and the task of the Church in the world.

5.2. Comparative Analysis

5.2.1. Historical Evangelicalism

Erickson (1997:101) makes the comment that Evangelicalism, by nature and as its name indicates, has always emphasised the proclamation of the gospel of salvation and been actively engaged in evangelism and missions. Regarding the doctrine of salvation he states, "By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fairly uniform position had been adopted by evangelicals" and includes the following listing of the major points thereof (ibid., p.101-102):

1. *God is a perfectly holy being, untouched by sin or temptation. Since he created humans to have fellowship with him, he expects them to be as perfectly holy as he is.*
2. *All humans are sinners, both by action and disposition. Not only do they perform sinful acts, but they have sinful natures. No one is righteous in God's sight, and no one can do anything to qualify for salvation.*
3. *The only basis for salvation is the sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*
4. *The reception of this salvation is only through conscious belief in Christ.*
5. *Death ends the opportunity for accepting this salvation. The relationship one has with Christ at the moment of death is eternally fixed.*
6. *All those who believe in Christ receive salvation in this life and spend eternity in heaven, in God's presence. All others are condemned to hell, a place of unending eternal anguish and suffering.*

The Manila Manifesto, which emerged as the official document of Lausanne II in 1989 as an elaboration of the theological and practical commitments of the *Lausanne Covenant* and thus, as one of the Evangelical church's most significant documents, reflects similar concerns as those contained in Erickson's list. The Lausanne Congress of 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland and the Lausanne Congress of 1989 are two of modern evangelicalism's most significant events and represent a unified attempt at a careful consideration and articulation of the Evangelical church's understanding of its core identity, message and role in the world, and is described in its own literature as "an international movement committed to energising *the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world*" (www.lausanne.org). The Manila Manifesto is divided into three sections under the headings: 1) the whole gospel, 2) the whole church, and 3) the whole world. Points 3-7 of the 21 affirmations of the Manila Manifesto state (www.lausanne.org):

3. *We affirm that the biblical gospel is God's enduring message to our world, and we determine to defend, proclaim and embody it.*
4. *We affirm that human beings, though created in the image of God, are sinful and guilty, and lost without Christ, and that this truth is a necessary preliminary to the gospel.*
5. *We affirm that the Jesus of history and the Christ of glory are the same person, and that this Jesus Christ is absolutely unique, for he alone is God incarnate, our sin-bearer, the conqueror of death and the coming judge.*
6. *We affirm that on the cross Jesus Christ took our place, bore our sins and died our death; and that for this reason alone God freely forgives those who are brought to repentance and faith.*
7. *We affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way.*

With regards to the nature of the atonement, Grudem (1994:579) describes the doctrine of Christ's death as penal substitution, in that he bore the penalty of sinners by dying a substitutionary death in their place, as having always been the orthodox understanding of Evangelical theologians. He states (ibid.): "This has been the orthodox understanding of the atonement held by evangelical theologians, in contrast to other views that attempt to explain the atonement apart from the idea of the wrath of God or payment of the penalty for sin."

The literature produced by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization indicates a dual emphasis in the Evangelical church's understanding of its task in the world. First, it is a church thoroughly committed to evangelism, and second, to compassionate service in the world. This is reflected in no uncertain terms in point 16 of the Manilla Manifesto: "16. *We affirm that every Christian congregation must*

turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service” (www.lausanne.org).

Similarly, points 8-15 and 16-21 state:

8. *We affirm that we must demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter.*
9. *We affirm that the proclamation of God's kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness.*
10. *We affirm that the Holy Spirit's witness to Christ is indispensable to evangelism, and that without this supernatural work neither new birth nor new life is possible.*
11. *We affirm that spiritual warfare demands spiritual weapons, and that we must both preach the word in the power of the Spirit, and pray constantly that we may enter into Christ's victory over the principalities and powers of evil.*
12. *We affirm that God has committed to the whole church and every member of it the task of making Christ known throughout the world; we long to see all lay and ordained persons mobilized and trained for this task.*
13. *We affirm that we who claim to be members of the Body of Christ must transcend within our fellowship the barriers of race, gender and class.*
14. *We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good.*
15. *We affirm that we who proclaim the gospel must exemplify it in a life of holiness and love; otherwise our testimony loses its credibility.*
16. *We affirm that every Christian congregation must turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service.*
17. *We affirm the urgent need for churches, mission agencies and other Christian organizations to cooperate in evangelism and social action, repudiating competition and avoiding duplication.*

18. *We affirm our duty to study the society in which we live, in order to understand its structures, values and needs, and so develop an appropriate strategy of mission.*
19. *We affirm that world evangelization is urgent and that the reaching of unreached peoples is possible. So we resolve during the last decade of the twentieth century to give ourselves to these tasks with fresh determination.*
20. *We affirm our solidarity with those who suffer for the gospel, and will seek to prepare ourselves for the same possibility. We will also work for religious and political freedom everywhere.*
21. *We affirm that God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. So we determine to proclaim it faithfully, urgently and sacrificially until he comes.*

The Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism with the following statement (www.lausanne.org):

To evangelize is to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.

John Stott, in his introduction to the report, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, which was written during the International Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility in 1982, admits to evangelicalism's previous suspicion of social involvement over the years and the WCC's legitimate criticism of Evangelicals' lack of social concern. The Lausanne Conferences and the establishment of special forums such this would, however,

signify a significant growth in the willingness of Evangelical church leaders to consider the God-ordained task of the Church in the world in a much more holistic light. Their theological basis for an increased social involvement would, however, continue to display a commitment to a significantly different set of doctrinal convictions and motivations for the task in which they would engage their world (www.lausanne.org).

The original Lausanne Covenant clearly described the Church's responsibilities in both evangelism and social action, but without going into any depth on how the two were related to one another, except to say that evangelism was of primary importance and social action secondary. The goal of the gathering mentioned in the previous paragraph was to work through this issue in more depth and arrive at more comprehensive understanding of and commitment to a more thorough biblical position on the matter. Although the report is extensive and beyond the scope of this paper to adequately represent, a quotation of the following paragraph will suffice for the purposes of understanding the gist thereof (*ibid.*):

In whatever more precise ways we may formulate these motivations of judgment, vision and continuity, we all are agreed that our Christian hope focuses on the personal, visible and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the resurrection from death, and on the perfected kingdom which his appearing will bring. Also, we all are agreed that we are to live our lives and do our works in the conscious expectation of his coming. This confidence will make us committed to world evangelization (Matt. 24:14), "zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:13,14), faithful to one another in the fellowship (Heb. 10:25), and courageous in suffering (2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rev. 2:25). With great firmness we therefore reject what has been called "eschatological paralysis". On the contrary, before the Lord comes, and in preparation for his coming, we are determined to get into the action. This is to "live anticipatorily", to experience the power, enjoy the community and manifest the righteousness of the kingdom now, before it is consummated in glory.

5.2.2. Brian McLaren

Consistent with that which this paper has reported thus far concerning the ECM, McLaren, in a paper prepared for the 2004 Billy Graham Center for Evangelism Roundtable convened around the topic “Issues of truth and power: the Gospel in a Post-Christian Culture”, suggests in his first point that most Christians may not actually understand the good news and should seek to rediscover it, or as he also puts it “Reboot our theology in a new understanding of the gospel of Jesus” (www.billygrahamcenter.com).

McLaren (*ibid.*) challenges the perspective that sees the Gospel as primarily being information about getting one’s personal soul into heaven after death and offers instead the suggestion that it is more occupied with the subject of the Kingdom of God, which has as its goal the will of God being done on earth even now. McLaren describes the Kingdom of God as “a new vision of what life can be (personal life, family life, community life, social life, global life in all its dimensions – cultural, business, political, economic, social, recreational, etc.)” as it exists in God’s dream for His creation, along with “a way of life that helps bring that vision into reality.”

Similarly, McLaren (*ibid.*) seems to concur with authors like Baker, Green and Wright (all of whom he references in his paper) that harm is done to the gospel when it is understood primarily in an atonement-centred, and particularly a penal-substitutionary-centred way. He suggests that the atonement, correctly understood, functions as more of a prelude preparing the way for the good news of the

Kingdom of God. Although McLaren never officially denies the validity of penal substitution, he neither affirms it nor emphasises its importance in his writings.

In his book *The story we find ourselves in: further reflections of a new kind of Christian*, McLaren expresses his thoughts and questions through the discussions that take place between the primary characters in the conversational story he tells. Although, one cannot directly quote McLaren's "words" here, there is certainly a sense that the words of his two main characters, Neo (the wise former pastor who has discovered a new and fuller way of following Christ) and Dan (the Evangelical pastor who has begun to show significant signs of emergence when compared to his character in McLaren's previous books in the series) reflect the emphases of McLaren's own theological persuasion.

During one scene in the book, the characters discuss the issue of the atonement and the following main points are made (2003:143-151):

1. A theory of the atonement is "a possible explanation for how Jesus' life and death play a role in the salvation of the human race" (ibid. p.143). These theories of the atonement should not be understood as fixed dogmas, but rather as windows that allow you to see not the whole sky but only different portions of the sky and therefore always contain an strong element of mystery.
2. The main assumption of each atoning theory is that humanity's alienation from God is a predicament it cannot solve for itself and can only be rectified by an act of God's grace. McLaren (ibid. p.144), through his character Dan, states: "So, in each theory, God graciously rescues us, forgives us; we

don't earn forgiveness at all, but we receive it as a gift, by grace, through faith.”

As the conversation develops, different theories of the atonement are briefly described and discussed, but the two presented last are given greater attention, and together with the ordering of the debate, make it obvious that McLaren looks upon them more favourably. The first is described by Neo as “the powerful weakness theory” (ibid., p.148) which has as its main tenet the act of Jesus becoming vulnerable on the cross and accepting suffering rather than meting out suffering on others. In doing so Jesus displays the loving heart of God who desires forgiveness for his creation and not revenge. By not retaliating, Jesus is able to accept suffering and transform it into reconciliation. McLaren (ibid.) writes:

So through this window, the cross shows God's rejection of the human violence and dominance and oppression that have spun the world in a cycle of crisis from the time of Cain and Abel through the headlines in this morning's Washington Post ... the cross calls humanity to stop trying to make God's kingdom happen through coercion and force, which are always self-defeating in the end, and instead, to welcome it through self-sacrifice and vulnerability.

In the story, Neo then goes on to describe a sixth, more personal understanding of the atonement as he recalls his own personal suffering as a result of his wife's betrayal in their marriage relationship. McLaren (ibid. p.150) writes:

... since that day, when I think of the cross, I think it's all about God's agony being made visible – you know, the pain of forgiving, the pain of absorbing the betrayal and forgoing any revenge, of risking that your heart will be hurt again, for the sake of love, at the very worst moment, when the beloved has been least worthy of forgiveness, but stands most in need of it. It's not just something legal or mental. It's not just words; it has to be embodied, and nails and thorns and sweat and tears and blood strike me as the only true language of betrayal and forgiveness.

For McLaren (2007:272), Jesus death served to expose the evil and ugliness of the ruling imperial power while his resurrection served to demonstrate God's victory over death and these opposing powers that hold his creation in bondage by proving that they were incapable of overcoming his heart of love and reconciliation and that a new revolution of new creation was in progress at the margins.

McLaren's departure from historical Evangelicalism's insistence on an atonement-centred understanding of the Gospel is consistent with his understanding of the Genesis record of the Creation and Fall events. McLaren (2006a:26-27) describes God, as "the good, free, creative Being", who brought into being a physical creation that would be endowed with a certain creative freedom of its own, yet at the same time always enjoy the blessing of God's care for and interaction with it as an intimate relational participant in the role of a good and wise king.

Without getting into debates regarding the literal or figurative nature of the event, McLaren (ibid.) describes Adam and Eve as the first human characters in the story and as made in the image of God, which he takes to mean two things: a) they reflected the goodness, creativity and freedom of God (Gen. 1:27); and b) they were representative agents of God's kingship in their care for creation. Their disobedience resulted in "a sense of shame and alienation from God and one another, violence of brother against brother, disharmony with creation itself, misunderstanding and conflict among tribes and nations.

In his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren (2004:262) refers to sin as "a counter-emergent virus." He is obviously not referring to emergent as it is used in

reference to Emergent Village, but rather to speak of a lack of personal internal integration between one's will, lusts and ideals, and the perfect ideal of God's Kingdom. He states (ibid.):

Sin, in this model, can be understood as lower levels or rings resisting the emergence of higher levels or rings, body-lusts refusing to be integrated with mental ideas in an ethical soul; individual wills (a mental faculty) refusing to develop the virtues of soul necessary so that healthy families and communities and cultures can emerge; individual kingdoms (which we would call me-isms) or national or religious or ethnic kingdoms (which we would call we-isms) refusing to yield territory to the emergence of the larger (and largest reality) – God's kingdom (which we could call good theism).

In stark contrast to the historical Evangelical reading of the Fall event and its definition of sin, McLaren makes no mention of sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4) and an injustice against God's holy character. As such, for McLaren (ibid. pp.95-96), the crux of salvation is not a deliverance from God's wrath poured out in righteous judgement on sinners but rather a breaking of the cycle of offense and alienation by God's actions of judgement and mercy. He states (ibid.) "God intervenes and breaks a chain of cause and effect, of offense and alienation, so we are truly saved -- liberated, rescued -- from the vicious cycle (a.k.a., mess.) we created." In this understanding humans are in need of salvation, not from the wrath of God, but from themselves and their destructive tendencies as they walk in spiritual blindness and in opposition to God's will for his creation.

McLaren (ibid.) describes the reason for the human tendency to do evil (whether big or small) and then persist in doing that same evil as being because humans are self-deceived, self-deluded and in denial. Salvation comes when this delusion and the evil in question is brought to light and exposed for what it is in the mind and heart of the offender. McLaren calls this God's saving judgement and justice

and equates it to conviction. God grants forgiveness and mercy to those who repent. McLaren maintains that without the presence of judgement and forgiveness, justice and mercy there can be no true or full salvation.

McLaren's definition of repentance is also different to the traditional Evangelical version. McLaren (2006a:) defines repentance as "to rethink – to reconsider your direction and consider a new one, to admit that you might be wrong, to give your life a second thought, to think about your thinking." It would seem that McLaren's appraisal of the human problem is that they are living in the wrong story. Salvation comes as they realise their error and begin to see, understand and respond to God's story – God's kingdom dream for his creation. This also leads into McLaren's understanding of the nature and object of saving faith. He states (2007:270): "This is "salvation by grace through faith" in a planetary sense: if we believe that God graciously offers us a new way, a new truth, and a new life, we can be liberated from the vicious, addictive cycles of our suicidal framing stories." As opposed to the traditional Evangelical stance that sees faith as a trust and belief in the substitutionary atonement of Christ on one's behalf as a sinner under the wrath and judgement of God, McLaren sees faith primarily as a trust and belief in, as well as a new personal alignment with, God's purposes, plans and actions to heal the effects of sin in the world and to bring complete restoration to his creation. Faith is a belief in this new framing story of the kingdom of God.

For McLaren (2006a:110-111) becoming a Christian is about responding to God's grace in 1) repentance (as defined earlier), 2) faith that trusts Christ enough to follow him in his kingdom, 3) a receptivity to receive God's own Spirit and all God

wants to give, and 4) a sincere public identification with the Kingdom of God and fellow seekers of the kingdom while learning to follow Jesus everyday over the whole course of one's life.

With regards to the extent of God's grace, McLaren admits to finding his views of God to be closer to those of some universalists than some exclusivists and identifies himself as "trying to find an alternative to both traditional Universalism and the narrow, exclusivist understanding of hell" (<http://blog.christianitytoday.com>). For McLaren the real issue is not "who's in" and "who's out", as he puts it, but rather "How can the kingdom of God more fully come on earth as it is in heaven, and how should disciples of the kingdom live to enter and welcome the kingdom? – which he believes are the questions that Jesus was asking.

When asked about his definition of the term missional in a recent interview, McLaren gave the following answer (www.the-next-wave.info):

The term missional asks this question: what is the purpose of the church? To enfold and warehouse Christians for heaven, protecting them from damage and spoilage until they reach their destination? Or to recruit and train people to be transforming agents of the kingdom of God in our culture? The missional church understands itself to be blessed not to the exclusion of the world, but for the benefit of the world. It is a church that seeks to bring benefits to its nonadherents through its adherents.

For McLaren, then, the mission of the church is to partner with God in His work of saving and transforming all of human society so that it again reflects His original intentions for creation. McLaren (2004:111) identifies Jesus pattern of selecting twelve disciples and teaching them a new way of life before sending them out to

teach everyone this new way of life. As they did so, and as the church today does so, the signs of the kingdom would and will follow. He writes (ibid.):

Oppressed people would be free. Poor people would be liberated from poverty. Minorities would be treated with respect. Sinners would be loved, not resented. Industrialists would realize that God cares for the sparrows and wildflowers – so their industries should respect, not rape, the environment. The homeless would be invited in for a hot meal. The kingdom of God would come – not everywhere at once, not suddenly, but gradually, like a seed growing in a field, like yeast spreading in a lump of bread dough, like light spreading across the sky at dawn.

5.2.3. Dan Kimball

Dan Kimball is considered by most observers of the ECM to be one of its more conservative voices. He is a pastor and published author and serves well to represent the missional focus of the ECM right, in terms of its theological and ecclesiological leanings, in contrast to McLaren who is representative of the ECM left.

Kimball (2003:202) also challenges a narrow gospel which only focuses on what salvation means in the future and not what the significance of its meaning for the present is. Consistent with the general kingdom focus of the ECM as described in this paper, Kimball (ibid.) advocates for a gospel that includes the emphasis of “living in the kingdom now, not just when we get to heaven.” It is important to note that Kimball holds to a significantly more traditional understanding of the concepts of sin, repentance and faith than McLaren and many others within the ECM and when these terms are heard in his rhetoric it is important to realise that there are often significant differences in assumed meaning.

Kimball (ibid.) describes the modern church as having been focused only on the problem of fixing sin (which he maintains is absolutely necessary) through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. He contrasts this with an emerging church focus of the gospel message, which he describes as: “Jesus died for your sins so that you can be his redeemed co-worker *now* in what he is doing in this world and can spend eternity with the one you are giving your life to in heaven when you die.” Kimball (ibid.) emphasises the need for evangelism to be made relevant to what he calls ‘post seekers’, by including an announcement that “the reign of God is present and available to us to participate in now through Jesus” as per Jesus’ teaching to his disciples that they should pray for God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

Kimball (ibid. p.224) also emphasises that the social responsibility of kingdom living needs to form a core value in terms of the church’s view of mission and highlights the responsibility of faith communities in the areas of social justice on behalf of the poor and needy by citing the New Testament instruction to “look after orphans and widows” (James 1:27).

While Kimball does emphasise a holistic kingdom understanding of the gospel and the purposes of God in the world he remains thoroughly committed to the evangelistic role of the church and the urgency of bringing ‘sinners’ the good news of how they can be forgiven, cleansed and reconciled to God through faith in the atoning work of Christ. This is clearly observable on his church’s website (www.vintagechurch.org) in the sections related to their ministry vision and beliefs.

Evangelism, however, is not regarded as a specific event that the church engages in at certain times, but is rather regarded as the natural outflow of their being as a faith community living intentionally in an understanding of its participation in God's mission in the world. The front page of their website states (www.vintagechurch.org):

We also value 'being' the church. Nowhere in the New Testament do you read that the followers of Jesus 'went to church.' What you do read is that the church (the people) gathered together. We believe that in the modern world, the 'church' has become known as a place that people go to vs. a people on a mission for God. Vintage does have large weekly worship gatherings, classes and meetings that happen at a "place"- but foremost, we function as a community of "people" who live as "the church" all week long.

Kimball (2003:203) asks the question "So what does evangelism look like in the emerging church?" and offers the following points in answer:

1. *Evangelism offers an invitation into the kingdom instead of a way to get to heaven.*

In Kimball's church, being a student, co-worker, apprentice, and disciple of Jesus in his kingdom is emphasised as the fruit produced by the gospel. Repentance is an important and natural part of this type of evangelistic approach which requires people to purposefully align themselves with kingdom living and become students of Jesus (ibid.).

2. *Evangelism is less of an invitation to an event and more of an invitation to enter into community.* Kimball (ibid, p.204) advocates for a Celtic model of Evangelism based on George Hunter's book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, which follows the following steps: a) "You first establish community with people or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith." b) "Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and

worship.” C) “In time, as they discover what you believe, you invite them to commit.” This is in contrast to a Roman model of evangelism (cf. Hunter) which presents the Christian message, then invites the hearer to decide to believe in Christ and become a Christian, after which, if they decide positively, they are welcomed into the church and its fellowship.”

3. *Evangelism is more dialogue and listening than preaching and telling.* (ibid. p.206)
4. *Evangelism is part of discipleship and church culture rather than something you do on the side* (ibid. p.207).
5. *Evangelism is “discipleship-evangelism” rather than entertainment based* (ibid. p.207-208).
6. *Evangelism may take a lot more time and trust-building today.* (ibid. p.208)

This is due to the fact that the people of emerging culture possess virtually no existing biblical worldview, making the process of conversion and sanctification much more messy as issues like their sexuality, their view of God, their sense of right and wrong, etc. all need to be re-learnt.

The core beliefs of Kimball's church, as listed on their website, indicate that although new perspectives regarding approaches to evangelism and doing church are clearly evident, the more holistic gospel they are attempting to embody and proclaim as a community is much more firmly rooted in its historic protestant heritage than that of McLaren and many others further left of centre in the ECM matrix. Kimball's church, like many in the ECM, expresses its commitment to a “humble theology” which admits its inability to know, understand and discern with 100% certainty everything in the Bible. Despite this, Kimball and his church do feel

that they are able to confidently hold to those Scriptural doctrines that have been held throughout the 2000 year history of the church as central to the faith. These include the Nicene Creed as well as specific affirmations of: Christ's perfect reflection of God's heart, character and being; Christ's sinless life and offering of himself as "the only perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross"; Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven; Christ's eventual return to "judge the world and bring an end to injustice as He restores all things to God's original intent"; the human predicament of sin, which Kimball describes as "failing to live by God's guidelines and moral standards," and its consequences of broken relationships with God and creation both spiritually and socially; the church as a people "empowered by God's Spirit to be part of the mission of God here on earth"; and, the fact that the church "does not exist for itself, but exists as a community of worshipers who are here to serve others, as Jesus told us to be his light, love, compassion, kindness and hope to the world" (www.vintagechurch.org).

Kimball and Vintage Faith Church (*ibid.*) do affirm belief in a literal hell and heaven and that at the end of all things Jesus will return to bring final justice and judgement to all but prefer to maintain a humble appreciation for the mystery that surrounds much of the Bible's teaching regarding the finer details of the afterlife and the end times.

For Kimball and Vintage Faith Church, the goal is not mere assent to these core beliefs but a commitment to the daily lifestyle practice and living-out of these beliefs. The following list represents some of the ways that Vintage Faith Church desires to live out what it believes:

- a) *We believe we live in the presence of God all day long.*
- b) *We believe that we are utterly dependent on God's Spirit to make personal change.*
- c) *We believe in the "priesthood" of all believers. I.e. all believers are in full-time ministry, serving God in all they do.*
- d) *We believe that you can't "go to church" because you "are the church" ... "we will be defined and function as a community of "people" who are living as the church all week long (1 Corinthians 12)."*
- e) *We believe that healthy followers of Jesus will be those who learn to "feed themselves" from the inspired Scriptures throughout the week.*
- f) *We believe that our daily lives should be missional ... "Being "missional" simply means being outward and others-focused, with the goal of expressing and sharing the love of Jesus."*
- g) *We believe the paid staff of the church serves to train, equip and care for the people of the church as we all serve on the mission together.*
- h) *We believe we are to love our neighbors as ourselves and pray for our enemies.*
- i) *We believe we are called to care about the oppressed, the poor and those experiencing injustice.*
- j) *We believe the covenant of marriage is a holy and sacred thing.*
- k) *We believe that parent(s) are the primary way the faith is taught and modelled to future generations and that we must see families holistically integrated in the church.*

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter sought to present a basic history of the development of Evangelicalism with the purpose of better understanding its identity and core values and attributes. When considered historically it is clearly seen that modern day Evangelicalism, like the ECM, was itself a reactionary movement to the perceived weaknesses and shortcomings of Fundamentalism. Despite the self-critical posture Evangelicalism would take of its own heritage as it sought to find solid middle ground between Fundamentalism and Liberalism, a strong sense of commitment to its theological orthodoxy remained with the renewed emphases and paradigms primarily being those of practical priorities and commitments such as those mentioned by Grenz (1993:27) earlier in the chapter:

... the development of a new social ethic; the setting forth of an intellectually credible Christian apologetic; a bold thrust in evangelism; the founding of institutions promoting education and scholarship; and transdenominational cooperation based on a sensed underlying spiritual unity.

The development of post-conservative theology represents another reaction of sorts to what it perceives to be the weaknesses and shortcomings of Evangelicalism, which it believes to be trapped in its preoccupations with the questions and structures of modernity. It is felt that postmodernism presents a new set of questions and issues which serve to expose the cultural accommodation of Evangelicalism to its modern paradigm. The significant difference between the new post-conservative reform and those taking place in conservative theology since its inception in the Protestant Reformation is that many of the core theological doctrines that were central to the movement's identity as it emerged from Roman Catholicism and is it sought to distinguish itself from liberalism many

years later, are now being questioned and revised representing a fundamental shift in the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.

A comparative analysis of the positions of historical Evangelicalism, Dan Kimball (a more conservative voice on the right of the ECM conversation) and Brian McLaren (a more 'liberal' voice on the left of the ECM conversation) on the theological issues that pertain to a "missional ecclesiology" revealed the influences of post-Conservative theology in various degrees. In certain cases a radical revision of core Evangelical doctrine is evident, in others the difference would seem to be more that of emphasis.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This paper has been an attempt to honestly and accurately portray the ECM in terms of that which is one of its core identity forming and unifying factors - its missional ecclesiology. Unfortunately, due to the confines of this paper, more attention could not be given to examples of the practical expressions thereof. Instead, priority was given to better understanding the thought processes and theological motivations undergirding the various ways ECM churches engage in practising their missional ecclesiology.

As the author of this paper is writing from a Reformed Baptist Evangelical heritage seeking to better understand the meaning and place of the Western church in God's purposes and in the world, the study of a movement asking the same questions and arising out of the same broader Evangelical heritage has been a stimulating and challenging task. Stimulating because the questions the movement is asking forces one to consider afresh many of one's basic assumptions and convictions; and challenging for the very same reason.

This final concluding chapter will present the author's findings, observations and critique of the research reported.

6.1. A Shift in Emphasis or a New Theology?

A brief consideration of chapter 4's attempts at sketching a basic understanding of the ECM's missional ecclesiology in the light of its primary influences, as well as chapter 5's more personal comparison of McLaren and Kimball's missional ecclesiology in contrast to that of historical Evangelicalism reveals that there is a significant amount of diversity in the movement and that there needs to be caution when making statements referring to the movement as a whole. However, based on the research of this paper, at least two definite observations of the movement can be made with regards to this study's particular topic of focus:

- a) At the very least, the ECM represents a significant shift in theological emphasis.
- b) At the most, the ECM, particularly in its Emergent form, represents a radical revisioning of Evangelical theology to the extent that there is a serious case for the questioning of whether it can legitimately continue to be called Evangelical.

Erickson (1997:141) illustrates the tensions involved in the task of making such an analysis in the questions he asks of post-conservative theology as a whole by referring to Zeno's paradox – the Greek philosopher's theory that motion and change are illusory. Erikson (ibid.) states:

To move from A to B, he said, one must first move from A to C, which is halfway to B. But before one can do that, he must move from A to D, which is halfway from A to C. But before doing that, however, one must move from A to E, which is halfway from A to D. Thus, one can never get there.

Erikson's (ibid.) concern is that if point A represents historic Evangelicalism and point B represents, for example, Neo-Orthodoxy, at exactly what point is a departure from point A deemed to no longer be considered Evangelical. His reasoning is thus (ibid.):

Then suppose we have a view which is halfway from A to B. Or perhaps it is only 40 percent of the way from A to B, so that it is closer to evangelicalism than neoorthodoxy. Is this point then considered to be evangelicalism? Seemingly it should be that, since it is closer to that than it is to neoorthodoxy. But suppose, further, that this theologian subsequently moves 40 percent of the way from C to B? Is this new position, closer to what was now called evangelicalism, to be considered evangelical, even though it is closer to neoorthodoxy than to the original limit of evangelicalism ... If a waterfowl looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, but walks like a goose, is it still a duck? If it then honks like a goose and walks like a goose but still looks like a duck, is it a duck or a goose? Surely there must come some point where the line has been crossed and at least a hybrid must be present.

Kimball and most of the ECM would seem to fit best under the category of those displaying a shift in theological emphasis when it comes to understanding God's mission as well as the mission and identity of the church in the world. Kimball's understanding of salvation and Christology, bearing in mind that he is certainly one of the movement's most orthodox voices, reflects a fairly orthodox Evangelical position on the matter. The significant change in emphasis across the spectrum of ECM churches is the understanding of the gospel, not primarily as the good news of personal salvation, but the good news of the arrival of the reign of God in Jesus Christ. For the ECM, personal salvation is part of that message, but not the whole message. Personal salvation needs to be interpreted within the context of the present arrival and future coming of the kingdom of God.

Those on the ECM right continue to emphasise the substitutionary atonement of Christ within the context of this broader kingdom paradigm. Those towards the

ECM centre seem to favour a broader view of the atonement that still has place for substitutionary atonement but as only one part of the multiple metaphors for the atonement making up the biblical witness, and often with a bias towards the Christus Victor model of atonement as the best paradigm within which to understand the significance of the cross and resurrection. Those on the ECM left seem to favour a non-atonement centred reading of the Gospel. That is not to say they have no place for the atonement, except to say that it is not the central aspect of the Gospel. Again, the favoured atonement understanding is that of the multiple metaphors paradigm with the difference that penal substitutionary atonement is thoroughly disregarded as being inconsistent with the character of God.

For those representing a historical Evangelical position, the ECM emphasis shifters might be regarded as the lesser of two evils when compared to their ECM revisionist brothers, but a cause for concern nonetheless. The Evangelical church, itself a broad and diverse movement, has only been able to exist as such because of a very clearly defined and agreed upon understanding of certain non-negotiable theological commitments – those which are felt to be the central aspects of the gospel and biblical Christianity, e.g. the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, substitutionary atonement, the divinity of Christ, etc. Matters of secondary importance, e.g. eschatology, the sovereignty of God, church governance, the nature of baptism, etc. are regarded as important and serve as identity markers of various groups within Christianity, but not the identity markers of Christianity itself and what it means to be a Christian. The fact that the ECM's shift in emphasis concerns theological issues occupying the level of primary importance means that they cannot just be glossed over for the sake of unity as a shift in emphasis that

results in confusion over that which is truly primary for a biblical faithful Christianity and Gospel witness runs the danger of in fact becoming a subtle but real threat to the spirit of unity and accommodation it is asking for.

6.2. A Recovery of the Narrative

An emphasis on a narrative reading of Scripture, within the broader Evangelical church, is not unique to the ECM movement. Graeme Goldsworthy's *According to Plan and Gospel and Kingdom* as well as Vaughn Roberts' *God's Big Picture* are examples of the significant efforts by some Evangelical scholars to educate Christians within their tradition of the hermeneutical importance of understanding the meaning of each part of Scripture in the context of the entire Scriptural narrative. Like the ECM, Goldsworthy (1981:47) and Roberts (2002:21) also identify the Kingdom of God theme, which they describe as "God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing", as the golden thread that runs through the entire narrative and holds it together.

In the writings of Goldsworthy and Roberts, however, it would seem that the significance of a narrative reading of Scripture is primarily hermeneutical. I.e. Important for exegeting, interpreting and applying texts in a biblical faithful and correct way. The ECM, drawing on influences like Wright, take this a step further by extending the significance of reading Scripture narratively beyond hermeneutics to being essential for a well formed ecclesiology. For the ECM, a narrative reading of Scripture is not just a helpful tool for applying Scripture to life now, but vital for the Church's proper understanding of its identity, role and mission in the world for

the simple reason that the story is not yet completed, it is still ongoing (cf. Wright's 5th Act). The ECM has encouraged the Church to not just read narratively, but in fact to live narratively – to recognise its place and role in the biblical story in terms of where the story has been and where it's heading, and to live accordingly. There is much that Evangelical theology and practice can benefit from if this model is to be explored in greater depth.

The ECM's challenge to historic Evangelicalism, however, is not just that of the necessity for a more thorough integration of the Scriptural narrative and ecclesiological practice, but a revised reading of the Scriptural story too. Again, as has already been conceded in this paper, there is some diversity of opinion with regards to the essential elements of the story – some more Evangelically orthodox and others more radical. It should be noted, therefore, that the comments that follow pertaining to this subject should be understood in the light of the research reported in chapter 4 of this paper, which the author believes to be a fair reflection of the significant influences on the ECM in this regard and the general stance of the more centrist voices in the movement.

Although there is much that is consistent between the ECM and Evangelical narrative readings of Scripture, there are significant elements in the story, particularly in the Old Testament, that, from an Evangelical perspective, are hardly dealt with or are in fact absent in the ECM reading and discussion thereof. Most noticeably are the place and function of the Old Testament sacrificial system of worship and atonement in the religious life of the nation of Israel and the basis upon which reconciliation between God and people and the forgiveness of sins is

possible. It is not as though these issues, which were God-ordained and a vital part of Israel's daily existence and national identity, can be regarded as secondary issues and non-essential to the story as a whole.

For Evangelicals these issues are central not just because of the extent to which they played a role in the life of Israel, but because they are believed in part to be the physical structure within which God would explicitly reveal the nature and extent of the human problem of sin and, in contrast, the nature of His own holy, righteous and just character. It would, however, also be the vehicle for the demonstration of His grace and love as He made provision for their forgiveness and cleansing in the present by foreshadowing the truest and most complete act of atonement that would yet come in Jesus Christ. The differences in understanding the atonement within the ECM and when compared to historic Evangelicalism have already been demonstrated in this paper. If alternate readings of the atonement are preferred by those within the ECM, the Old Testament sacrificial system cannot simply be glossed over. It needs to be properly accounted for in their total understanding of the narrative as well as their reading of the person and work of Christ, in which the Church bases its understanding of its own identity and calling in the world.

6.3. The Missio Dei and the Kingdom of God

The ECM speaks of the community of the Church as not only a present sign and foretaste of the Kingdom, but as an agent of the Kingdom too. Gibbs and Bolger (2005:53,56) state:

The *missio Dei* represents God's active participation in the redemption of the world. God pursues everything in creation in need of direction and repair ... Jesus proclaimed the good news that his hearers could join him in a new way of life. More than simply offering a message of personal salvation, Jesus invited his followers to participate in God's redemption of the world.

The ECM identify the presence of God's kingdom to be there where God is working to bring renewal, peace, justice and righteousness where there was previously bondage and death. In this sense then, the Kingdom exists beyond the walls of the church. Gibbs and Bolger (ibid., p.54) speak of the Kingdom being present wherever Jesus is present and of the gospel being more than personal salvation but also "social transformation arising from the presence and permeation of the reign of Christ."

It is at this point that the ECM and historic Evangelicalism part ways again. Whereas the ECM feels it is able to identify the coming of the Kingdom and rule of God in those places where the values of the Kingdom have overcome and defeated the powers and principalities of bondage, oppression and injustice, historic Evangelicalism, while realising that it is the Kingdom that gives rise to the church, maintains that the kingdom in its present form cannot be known apart from the church. A good example of this distinction can be seen in the document *Evangelism and social responsibility: an Evangelical commitment* drafted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and the World Evangelical Fellowship in 1982. The document, in answer to the question of how extensive is the kingdom to which the signs thereof point, states (www.lausanne.org):

In one sense, as we have seen, God's rule extends only over those who acknowledge it, who have bowed their knee to Jesus and confessed his lordship (Phil. 2:9-11). These God "has delivered ... from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13).

Apart from them, the whole world is "in the power of the evil one", its "ruler" and "god" (1 John 5:19; John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4), for "we do not yet see everything in subjection to" Jesus (Heb. 2:8; cf. Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:35). Yet in another sense, the Risen Lord claimed that "all authority in heaven and on earth" had been given to him (Matt. 28:18). For already God has "put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things for the church" (Eph. 1:22). His titles are "King of kings and Lord of lords" and "the ruler of princes on earth" (Rev. 1:5; 19:16).

The document then goes on to ask how these two perspectives can be fused and finds satisfaction with the answer that Christ rules *de facto* over his redeemed reconciled people while it is only *de jure* that he is presently King over the world where his rule is still challenged.

From a historic Evangelical perspective it is only in submission to the rule of God in the context of a reconciled relationship with the Father that the blessings of His rule can be truly known (peace, righteousness and justice). This is the picture on display in the Garden of Eden before the fall as well as the picture of the people of God in the presence of God at the end of the book of Revelation. Both pictures have the same common denominators: the absence of sin and a right relationship with God expressed in willful submission to His perfect rule and the enjoyment of the blessings of that perfect rule. From this perspective it is impossible to conceive that in situations where the church has worked to bring justice and righteousness and overcome oppression in a particular situation that the recipients thereof can be considered to be enjoying the blessings of the present rule of Christ when they themselves might not even know or follow Christ. For this reason, as reflected in all the writings coming out of the Lausanne gatherings, social action and evangelism are both regarded as vital parts of the Christian church's witness to the good news of God's salvation and coming Kingdom, but evangelism, which brings people into the place of reconciliation and right relationship with God that is the

necessary precursor to enjoying the benefits of His Kingly rule, will always be primary. The Lausanne document mentioned previously goes on to state the following (ibid.):

It is important to maintain the tension between what Christ rules de facto and de jure. For if we assume that all authority has in fact been given to him, we shall not take seriously the evil powers which have not yet capitulated. If, on the other hand, our horizon is bounded by the community in which the King is consciously confessed, we may be tempted to dismiss the rest of the world as beyond redemption. From these extremes of naive optimism and dark pessimism we return to the radical realism of the Bible, which recognizes both the defeat of evil and its refusal to concede defeat. This double conviction will persuade us to work hard in evangelism and in the quest for justice, while at the same time putting our whole trust and confidence in God.

The mission of the Church is to live out its new status as a community reconciled to God and living under His rule – sanctification. Wright might be right that the kingdom works of Christians now do have value in eternity and that they devoting themselves to “building for the kingdom”, but to make it the primary way the church is to understand its role in the world is pushing it too far as it is certainly something, if present, that is more implicit than explicit in Scripture. Explicitly the church is called to proclaim Christ and the gospel, while at the same time, as his body, ‘manifesting’ Christ to the world. It is here that the spiritual versus social dimensions of the Gospel find unity and harmony. The Kingdom is only built as people are brought into reconciled relationships with God. It is only there that the Kingdom life can be manifest because it is only there that submission to God’s rule is being demonstrated.

6.4. Unfortunate Generalisations

While the ECM certainly represents a healthy challenge to much of the pop consumer Christianity on offer, which has made God an accomplice to people's personal desires and goals, and seeks a radical recommitment to God's mission of reconciliation and the rediscovery of the church's role and identity therein, it is unfortunate that in their zeal they are often guilty of caricaturing and misrepresenting the Evangelical church by setting up "straw-man" arguments that overlook the many voices in Evangelicalism who have been calling for some of the same shifts in priority over a much longer period of time. The main problem with setting up "straw-men" is that it is essentially dishonest. A false representation of one's opponent is easy to attack and discredit.

Brian McLaren's writings provide some good examples of ECM reactions to a form of pop Christianity as if it is representative of historic Evangelicalism. A good example comes from McLaren's website (www.brianmclaren.net) where he states:

... there are two very different understandings of the gospel afoot in our churches today: one is a gospel of evacuation and the other a gospel of transformation. One gospel says that God has given up on creation and plans to destroy it, extracting souls for a disembodied existence in heaven. The other gospel says that God is faithful to creation and is at work to heal it and save it from human sin, and promises that any sacrifice we make to be co-laborers with God in God's saving and healing work will be amply rewarded in this life and the next. One gospel offers little hope for the earth and its inhabitants in history, and focuses their hope beyond this life only. The other gospel is good news for all people (Luke 2:10) offers hope for both this life and the life beyond.

While there certainly is a version of the Gospel that has very little emphasis on God's commitment to the renewal and restoration of his creation, to portray this as the historic Evangelical alternative to the new fuller gospel he is endorsing is

dishonest. In contrast to McLaren's caricature, the Lausanne paper on evangelism and social action referred to above reveals a more accurate description of the historic Evangelical position on the good news of salvation (www.lausanne.org):

We are all agreed that salvation is a broad term, in the sense that it embraces the totality of God's redemptive purpose.

It begins with *new life*. Through the substitutionary death and historical resurrection of Jesus, the individual believer is "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven". Saved from guilt and the judgment of God, he or she is adopted into God's family as his child.

Salvation continues with the *new community*. For salvation in the Bible is never a purely individualistic concept. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God is calling out a people for himself and binding it to himself by a solemn covenant. The members of this new society, reconciled through Christ to God and one another, are being drawn from all races and cultures. Indeed, this single new humanity—which Christ has created and in which no barriers are tolerated—is an essential part of the Good News (Eph. 2:11-22).

Thirdly, salvation includes the *new world* which God will one day make. We are looking forward not only to the redemption and resurrection of our bodies, but also to the renovation of the entire created order, which will be liberated from decay, pain and death (Rom. 8:18-25). Of this cosmic renewal the resurrection of Christ was the beginning and the pledge.

By misrepresenting the corrupted elements of Evangelical theology as representative of its position as a whole it creates the perception that only one viable option of response remains - a revolution of theological revision and a rediscovery of the true gospel. When it becomes apparent that many of the deficiencies of pop Evangelicalism that the ECM is reacting to are themselves inconsistent with the historic Evangelical position that is committed to much of the more holistic understanding of the gospel the ECM is advocating for, the options for reaction broaden to include not just a revolutionary theological revisioning, but the alternative of a prophetic call of reformation to return to already established, albeit slightly neglected, commitments and convictions.

6.5. Conversation Partners

Erickson (1997:129) comments on the likelihood of a continued shift to the left in post-conservative theology due to the simple fact that the primary conversation partners they are engaging with more often than not stem from the post-liberal and neo-orthodox camps. This is accentuated by a reduced interaction with more conservative evangelicals who, it would appear, are viewed as having increasingly little of real value to bring to the table. True dialogue requires a genuine humility that enables an openness to sincerely hear all perspectives on an issue. Like a rebellious teenage son who is of the opinion that his dad, who may have been around a lot longer than himself, is too old-fashioned and stuck in his ways to really know anything about life today, ECM churches need to be careful of discounting their own Evangelical theological heritage in the same way.

6.6. Missiological Questions

The area that the Evangelical church can really be grateful for, and has much to gain from the ECM critique, is that of their work in exposing the cultural shifts and changes in the position of the church in Western society in recent times and being on the forefront of realising the need for the basic missionary questions to be asked again of its own context. The ECM's stance in this regard is strongly consistent with the spirit of Evangelicalism as it has sought to be effective in faithfully ministering and applying the gospel in foreign cultures. An example of this Evangelical commitment to a sensitive and contextualised gospel can be found in Lausanne's 1978 *Willowbank Report*. It states (www.lausanne.org):

Sensitive cross-cultural witnesses will not arrive at their sphere of service with a pre-packaged gospel. They must have a clear grasp of the "given" truth of the gospel. But they will fail to communicate successfully if they try to impose this on people without reference to their own cultural situation and that of the people to whom they go. It is only by active, loving engagement with the local people, thinking in their thought patterns, understanding their world-view, listening to their questions, and feeling their burdens, that the whole believing community (of which the missionary is a part) will be able to respond to their need. By common prayer, thought and heartsearching, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, expatriate and local believers may learn together how to present Christ and contextualize the gospel with an equal degree of faithfulness and relevance. We are not claiming that it will be easy, although some Third World cultures have a natural affinity to biblical culture. But we believe that fresh creative understandings do emerge when the Spirit-led believing community is listening and reacting sensitively to both the truth of Scripture and the needs of the world.

The post-Christendom and post-modern shift in Western society has certainly brought about a situation of increasing alienation for Christianity and the church in its host culture. The ECM provides a necessary challenge to the Western church's possible blinkers in terms of its own cultural captivity to modernism and a society where church still played a central role in the culture. The ECM represents a significant challenge for the Evangelical church to be consistent in its application of its own missionary insights as it faces an increasingly new context and worldview to which it must minister.

6.7. Final thoughts

There is much for the Evangelical church to gain from its interaction with the ECM. Although there is much that would concern them theologically, the ECM in its example provides a strong call for the Church to rediscover its missional identity as a sent community participating in God's mission of love, reconciliation and renewal in Jesus Christ. The ECM represents a necessary critique of the

attractional-consumeristic model of church that has become so popular in the Western Christianity as a cultural rather than biblical construct, and strives instead to realise the goal of communities of Christ followers who faithfully embody the Kingdom of God in their particular context. They are also bound by the conviction that unless the church embraces this fundamental shift in perspective, there is little hope for its growth and effectiveness in a society that increasingly shows less and less need for its presence or even existence.

With regards to the ECM itself, although it is committed to unity in diversity of opinion and insight in the belief that each one needs to learn from and have a shaping influence on the other, Evangelical history itself will show that this is only really possible where there is a greater affinity and unity in core beliefs with the discussions and dialogue revolving around matters of secondary importance. The ECM as it exists at present is broad, theologically speaking, and on certain levels the differences in terms of its core theology are significant. Logic would suggest that a point has to come when the tension become too much and the primary factions part company. Time will tell how long the ECM is able to move forward in its current form. Irrespective of whether time will show the ECM to be a flash in the pan or a significant movement of reformation and revision for the future of the church in the West, it cannot be denied that its present existence, though often uncomfortable for conservative Evangelicalism, has been significantly important in the questions it has asked and the challenge it has brought.

As the missional conversation continues to develop as more and more people engage in it, the observations of this paper would urge for caution in the use of

terminology without clarity on what each person or group means by the terms they are using. Realising that singular terms are used to convey multiple meanings, the missional conversation can only really grow and mature as the participants thereof adopt a commitment to accuracy in the understanding of their own assumptions as well as those with whom they engage. This paper has shown that different understandings of the Scriptural narrative will lead to different understandings of the Church's place in the story now and different definitions of what it means to be missional. On principle, missional entails the incarnational, outward movement of church communities who find the basis for their identity and mission in God's mission to restore and reconcile His broken creation in Jesus Christ. In practice, this definition is broad with numerous nuances in understanding and interpretation coming into play regarding the emphases and definitions of the nature of God's mission.

CHAPTER 7

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