DISCIPLESHIP:
YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

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INTRODUCTION

If we are to understand the critical task of the church to make disciples at the very start of the twenty-first century, then we must carefully construct a solid biblical, theological and historical foundation which has its roots firmly planted in the New Testament, its branches swaying in the last breezes of the Enlightenment and its topmost growth reaching out to the still uncertain air of Post-modernism.

If we are to avoid the oft-told tale of placing new patches of discipleship programming on the old wineskins of a truncated ecclesiology, then we must compare and contrast the pure and golden age of New Testament discipleship with the hyper-dynamic cultural change we are currently involved in. Therefore, the primary strokes of this paper are painted in theological, contextual and historical hues.

In a previous paper I have explored the centrality of the phrase “make disciples” in the Great Commission as given by Matthew. The understanding of the Great Commission was greatly enhanced by linking both the commission and its major terms with the narratives and discourses which preceded it. “The theme of discipleship is central to Matthew’s gospel and to Matthew’s understanding of the church and mission” (Bosch 1997:73).

More than any other text in the Bible, Matthew’s ‘Great Commission’ has been used by the Protestant missionary movement to inspire and shape its outreach to people across the globe. This important text has often been lifted out of its context and has been subject to either limited or wrong understandings.

Although there is no consensus by scholars regarding the exact nature of the structure of Matthew, it is clear that both the narrative and discourse material are carefully constructed and linked together both by a number of structures and common themes. These themes are
developed throughout the gospel and are encountered one final time in the giving of the Great Commission.

The theme of Christ’s authority and Lordship is central to the gospel and the final commission. The right of Jesus to rule is both attested and contested in Matthew. The same questions raised by the religious leaders of the Jews will no doubt be raised by the leaders of the nations as well. As such, Matthew has provided the missionary disciples a wonderful compendium of material on how Jesus handled questions of His authority.

Disciples are to be made through responding to the call to be baptized and following the teachings of Jesus. Again, Matthew has given a wealth of material which the disciples can use as they go forth in obedience to the Great Commission. The calls to follow Jesus in commitment are both frequent and diverse.

Over twenty-five percent of Matthew is filled with rich discourse, with the Sermon on the Mount being the largest single unit of Christ’s teachings in the four gospels. Along with the narratives that surround the discourses, the disciples have a large storehouse from which to bring forth things new and old. Lastly, the promise of Christ’s presence continues to echo until the gospel is preached as a witness to all the nations.

From the above brief summation and conclusions it is evident that Matthew’s book could be seen as a manual on discipleship. Although it might not be possible to conclude that Matthew wrote or that the apostles used the book for this purpose, it is clear that there is abundant justification to do so.

Seeking to further buttress the biblical and theological foundation of making disciples, I have researched and am in the process of writing an expose’ of the seminal importance of the Holy Spirit and discipleship as portrayed in Luke-Acts. In this regard: "Luke 4:16-21 has, for all practical purposes, replaced Matthew's 'Great Commission' as the key text not only for understanding Christ's own mission but also that of the church" (Bosch 1997:84).
As such, Luke 4:16-21 is seen as “being of programmatic significance” (Marshall 1971:91). The same Spirit which rests upon the Messiah will soon be promised and given in abundance to the waiting and praying community of disciples at Pentecost.

Luke's pneumatology was one of the first aspects of his theology that came to be studied for itself. More than any other New Testament author Luke speaks of the Spirit of God and it is commonly observed that the Spirit is 'the connecting thread which runs through both parts' of his work,' or the 'unifying force throughout Luke's narrative'' (Verheyden 1999:41).

Originally, I was going to have a section connected with Luke-Acts which dealt with the context of the early church and discipleship. But having accumulated over fifty pages of quotations and a multitude of important themes, I thought it best to place the New Testament contextual picture in the same gallery as the Enlightenment and Post-Modern periods.

Therefore, this discussion of discipleship will envelope the New Testament, the Modern and the Post-Modern contexts with the specific aim to uncover the dynamics which have hindered or aided the process of making disciples.
CHAPTER 1
DISCIPLESHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This first section focuses on how an intimate and inclusive community of believers was able to witness and minister to the highly diverse and condensed urban reality from which it grew.

The Urban Reality of the New Testament

Perhaps the first thing one would notice approaching a Greco-Roman city of the first century was the smell. Because of limited water, means of sanitation and the incredible density of humanity and animals, most of the people in the cities “must have lived in filth beyond our imagining” (Stark 1991:153). The crowded streets were churning with mud, open sewers, manure and crowds which created a stench that must have been “overpowering for many miles—especially in warm weather . . . no wonder they were so fond of incense” (Stark 1991:154).

Compared to modern cities, urban areas in Paul’s day were “very small” (Meeks 1983:28). Many cities such as Antioch were originally founded as walled fortresses. Urban centers tended to develop within these limited confines which could easily be walked in an afternoon.

Unable to expand economically beyond the walls, the population density of these cities was very high. The immediate environs of Antioch probably housed about 150,000 inhabitants in a two square mile area. This works out to “roughly 75,000 inhabitants per square mile or 117 per acre. As a comparison, in Chicago today there are 21 inhabitants per
acre; San Francisco has 23, and New York City overall has 37” (Stark 1991:149). Manhattan has 100 per acre spread out vertically.
Most people lived in tiny cubicles as part of multi-storied tenements. Entire families were herded together into one room. For purposes which shall be very important in our discussion of the emergence of individualism in the modern era, the opportunity for any private moments in New Testament times “was rare” (Meeks 1983:29).

Due to the crowded conditions at home, it was natural for most people to seek relief in the public streets and facilities. An imaginary, yet engaging picture of a newcomer to Rome walking down a street in the middle of the afternoon is painted by Robert Banks in his little booklet Going to Church in the First Century:

I must say I found the narrow streets oppressive after being so long on the open road. Some of them were scarcely three meters wide. They were also muddy beyond description and quite insecure underfoot. Since work had already stopped for most, a fair number of people were already about, and at times we found it difficult to make our way. The streets wound so much, first this way, then that, that I soon lost whatever small sense of direction I had (1990:7).

In Paul’s day a majority of people lived in the country, a worldwide trend which would not be tipped in favor of city-living until the latter part of the twentieth century. However, it was in the city which provided the most fruitful ground for the emerging sect of Christianity to take root and grow into a worldwide movement.

Rodney Stark categorically states that “Christianity was an urban movement, and the New Testament was set down by urbanites” (1991:147). Paul himself “was a city person” and when he “rhetorically catalogs the places where he has suffered danger, he divides the world into city, wilderness, and sea (2Cor. 11:26)” (Meeks 1983:9).

Although Christianity was nurtured in the small rural communities around the Sea of Galilee, “within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement” (Meeks 1983:11). “Even without qualification, every competent historian has
known that the Christian movement arose most rapidly in the Greco-Roman cities of Asian Minor, sustained by the very large communities of the Jewish diaspora” (Stark 1991:143).

The explosive growth of Christianity during the first century was aided in no small way by the wonderful network of roads which were built by the engineers and protected by the military. That expansion of the Christian faith “was closely associated with personal mobility, both physical and social . . . . The people of the Roman Empire traveled more extensively and more easily than had anyone before them—or would again until the nineteenth century” (Meeks 1983:17).

The roads provided flexibility in movement and became the conduit for the importation of a diversity of people into the increasingly cosmopolitan cities. An individual could exchange the narrow confines of the rural for the broad freedom of the urban. The prodigal son, who escaped his immediate family and went into “a distant country” (Luke 15:13) in order to imbibe in riotous living. This familiar story most likely reflects the changing moral fortunes of individuals both yesterday and today. As Claude Fischer affirms, the people who living in modern cities “are more likely than rural residents to behave in ways that diverge from the central and/or traditional norms of their common society” (1975:1321).

“MacMullen emphasizes the conservatism of villages, their ‘central characteristic.’ ‘They and their population hovered so barely above subsistence level that no one dared risk a change’” (Meeks 1983:15). Modern sociological research has affirmed that a breakup in a person’s social network often leads to a greater freedom for unconventional behavior:

“When people lack attachments, they have much greater freedom to deviate from the norms. In modern studies, unconventional behavior is strongly correlated with various measures of population turnover and instability. For example, where larger proportions of the U.S. and Canadian populations are newcomers or have recently moved from one residence to another, rates of participation in unconventional religious activities are high (Stark and Bainbridge 1985)” (Stark 1991:144).
Wayne Meeks, in his book The First Urban Christians, postulates that “such transitions and such dissonance may have been important in circles from which Pauline Christianity drew its members” (1983:21). This is because of the well known effect of change and increased receptivity to new relationships and ideas. This same circulation of people not only increased the receptivity but the pluralism within the city. “The movements of peoples had brought many other cults to the city as well” (Meeks 1983:44). Like our own day, New Testament urbanism was teeming with a diversity of people and ideas:

Urban society in the early Roman Empire was scarcely less complicated than our own, in proportion to the scale of knowledge available to an individual and of demands made upon him. Its complexity—its untidiness to the mind—may well have been felt with special acuteness by people who were marginal or transient, either physically or socially or both, as so many of the identifiable members of the Pauline churches seem to have been (Meeks 1983:104).

With all these religions, the question needs to be raised just how Christianity emerged as a dominant movement within the Empire. Rodney Stark, along with others, has been a proponent of the marketing thesis in the rise of religions. “Typically the fate of new religious movements is largely beyond their control, depending greatly on features of the environment in which they appear” (1991:191). Although the freedom of movement and religious thought provided an open market for new religions to appear, “Christianity would have remained an obscure religious movement had the many firms making up Roman pluralism been vigorous” (Stark 1991:197).

The “excessive pluralism” (Stark 1991:197) within the Empire strained the personal and corporate resources to stage the lavish feasts which were used to attract and keep adherents:

Tertullian, Apology 39: “The Salii cannot have their feast without going into debt; you must get the accountants to tell you what the tenths of Hercules and the sacrificial banquets cost; the choicest cook is appointed for the Apaturia, the Dionysia, the Attic mysteries; the smoke from the banquet of Serapis will call out the firemen (1989 ed.) (Stark 1991:198).
It was out of this pluralism that Christianity grew, and not just from among the most marginalized classes of people. Celsus who was the first pagan author we know of who took Christianity seriously enough to write a book against it, “alleged that the church deliberately excluded educated people because the religion was attractive only to ‘the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children’ (Meeks 1983:51).

Paul’s letters do provide us with small clues of who might have been involved in the early Christian movement. It is clear that at least some of the believers had, “houses, slaves, the ability to travel, and other signs of wealth. Some of the wealthy provided housing, meeting places, and other services for individual Christians and whole groups. In effect, they filled the role as patrons” (Meeks 1983:73). Robert Banks concurs that “a significant number of people in the church came from the more respected levels of society” (1998:116). Although the “extreme top and bottom” are missing, “a Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society” (Meeks 1983:73).

The observation that early Christianity only flourished among the poor and dispossessed is also countered by the study of modern sociology. “If the early church was like all the other cult movements for which good data exist, it was not a proletarian movement but was based on the more privileged classes” (Stark 1991:33). Stark argues from empirical study that religious skepticism often exists most strongly among the more privileged classes. Hence the early adopters of most cult movements are often drawn from the upper classes which then provide the financial and political resources necessary for that group to survive.

Robert Banks notes that as the Roman Empire expanded, the power became concentrated in a self-advancing minority.

Disenchantment with the polis not only took place among the politically disadvantaged sections of society but also increased among those, who in earlier days, had found their identity partly within it. To some extent the household community was the beneficiary of this exclusion from the real bodies where civil power resided. What people could not find in the wider
community to which they belonged they sought in the smaller community in which they lived (1998:7).

It is to this reinvestment in the smaller, household communities that our attention now turns.

The Intimate Community

The Greek and Roman cultures had a number of voluntary societies which can be compared and contrasted with the community of believers which emerged in New Testament times. These societies tended to be “small groups in which intensive face-to-face interactions were encouraged” (Meeks 1983:78). Membership was voluntary, rather than by birth and they shared in the practice of rituals, the eating of a common meal and other fraternal activities.

Unlike the voluntary associations which tended to be much more homogeneous, rich and poor, free and slave would associate together in the Christian households (Banks 1998:26). “Christian groups were much more inclusive in terms of social stratification” (Meeks 1983:79). Joining the Christian community meant a radical resocialization, where the sect was to become the primary group of its members, supplanting all other loyalties.

The New Testament communities both built upon past Jewish forms of community and transformed them. Although the meeting in private houses, the reading of Scriptures, prayers and exhortations were similar in the Synagogue, the Christian community sought to break down the strong ethnic boundaries, reject the role of circumcision and greatly elevate the role of women.

The household communities which were primarily created and nurtured by Paul were unique, interrelated entities which were founded on his understanding of the gospel:

“Christ’s radical words, ‘Who are my brethren?’ and ‘When two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them,’ lie behind Paul’s approach to community relations and assemblings. Christ’s sacrificial service stands as the model and motive for those who have special responsibilities in the
community, including Paul himself. Christ’s resurrection power acts as a the source of the community’s unity and as the dynamic behind the gifts and ministries exercised within the community. Paul’s understanding of community is nothing less than the gospel itself!” (Banks 1998:190).

The gospel as taught by Paul and practiced in the community was not merely an individual affair based on personal beliefs. The gospel bound believers to God as well as to one another.

Acceptance by Christ necessitated acceptance of those whom he had already welcomed (Rom 15:7); reconciliation with God entailed reconciliation with others who exhibited the character of gospel preaching (Phil 4:2-3); union in the Spirit involved union with one another, for the Spirit was primarily a shared, not individual experience . . . . To embrace the gospel, then, is to enter into community” (Banks 1998:26-27).

Hence the New Testament stressed the Trinitarian nature of the gospel, the church and the community. The gospel story relates how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit focused all its heavenly resources in order to secure the salvation and restoration of a personally and corporately disjointed people on earth. Through God’s own initiative, individuals were to be “called out” (ekklesia) of the world in order to form a new community which would transform both themselves and the world.

“This means that the ekklesia is not merely a human association, a gathering of like-minded individuals for a religious purpose, but is a divinely created affair” (Banks 1998:31). The commonest use of ekklesia referred to a town meeting of free male citizens of a Greek city. The term is used for the whole Christian movement (1Cor. 10:32); churches within a region (1Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2), local churches (1Thess. 1:1; Col. 4:16); and “for the smallest cell of the Christian movement, the household assembly” (Meeks 1983:108), (cf. Rom. 16:5, 19; Col. 4:15).

The primary importance of the term ekklesia is not to designate a building or purely institutional structures of administrative concerns. “Its chief importance lies in the way it stresses the centrality of meeting for community life: it is through gathering that the
community comes into being and is continually recreated” (Banks 1998:46). The primary focus of the gathering was to restore and build a worshipping, wholistic community.

The intimacy of the household “was the basic context within which most if not all the local Pauline groups established themselves” (Meeks 1983:84). Due to its limited size “a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably” (Banks 1998:35). Within this domestic space the Lord gathered a diversity of people from all across the Mediterranean area.

In an attempt to describe this community of believers and seekers, Paul used the metaphors of family (Gal. 6:10); adopted children (Gal. 4:4-5); heirs (Rom. 8:16-17); and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:18-19). “Adelphoi, ‘brethren’ is by far and away Paul’s favorite way of referring to the members of the communities he is writing” (Banks 1998:50-51).

In addition, the church is pictured as a body, within which the Spirit gives a variety of gifts (1Cor. 12) in order to edify one another (Eph. 4:11-13) in love (1Cor. 13). Their relationship with one another therefore was internally generated through the fruits of the Spirit and externally manifested by the gifts of the Spirit. Through the Spirit, “those groups enjoyed an unusual degree of intimacy, high levels of interaction among members, and a very strong sense of internal cohesion and of distinction” (Meeks 1983:74).

The local groups of Christians which were spread and multiplied all across the Mediterranean not only enjoyed a high level of cohesion and group identity but were also continually made aware that they belonged to a larger movement. Meeks well summarizes this interrelatedness between the groups:

It is evident, too, that Paul and the other leaders of the mission worked actively to inculcate the notion of a universal brotherhood of the believers in Messiah Jesus. The letters themselves, the messengers who brought them, and the repeated visits to the local assemblies by Paul and his associates all emphasized interrelatedness. It is noteworthy that the places where the household assemblies are mentioned are all in the context of greetings in letter closings or (Philemon) openings. The smallest unit of the movement is
addresses precisely in the epistolary context that remains the readers of the larger fellowship by mentioning names and groups and other places (1983:109).

Paul’s collection for the famished Jews in Palestine throughout the Gentile world of Asia Minor (1Cor. 16:1) further solidified these group’s status with the soil from which the Old Testament promises and the New Testament fulfillment had sprung.

The Witnessing Community

The new sect of Christianity which was emerging in the first century was conscious of both the boundaries which separated it from the world and its obligation to engage that world in witness and ministry. “Certainly a group that possesses information to which no one else has access is a group strongly conscious of the boundaries between itself and nonmembers” (Meeks 1983:92). However, the group did not withdraw like the Essenes in Qumran. “They remained in the cities, and their members continued to go about their ordinary lives in the streets and neighborhoods, the shops and agora” (Meeks 1983:105).

Therefore the group’s internal life did not take place in complete isolation, but with an eye toward how they were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Indeed, it has been posited that the rapid spread and strength of Christianity was not only dependent upon pure faith and doctrine but by the network of social interaction both inside and outside of the group. According to Adolf von Harnack, it was this strong social interaction between the people ‘and not any evangelist, which proved to be the most effective missionary’” (Meeks 1983:108).

Rodney Stark cites a source that lists 25 empirical studies on the effectiveness of social networks and conversion (1991:18). His own work in studying Moonies concluded that “conversion is not about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one’s
religious behavior into alignment with that of one’s friends and family members (1996:16-17). His study of Mormons showed the same tendency:

When [Mormon] missionaries make cold calls, knock on the doors of strangers, this eventually leads to a conversion once out of a thousand calls. However, when missionaries make their first contact with a person in the home of a Mormon friend or a relative of that person, this results in conversion 50 percent of the time (Stark and Bainbridge) (Stark 1996:18).

Therefore Stark concludes that: ‘social movements recruit primarily on the basis of interpersonal attachments that exist, or form, between the convert and members of the group” (1991:138). We have already seen that the multitude of household-centered groups which formed in the wake of Christian evangelism certainly had enough glue to stick both the new and more mature members together. But what provided the opportunity and basis for the addition of new members?

Rodney Stark posits that early Christianity was successful because it was powered by a new morality based on the teaching of Jesus to feed the hungry, be hospitable to the stranger, look after the sick and visit those in prison (Matt. 25:35-40).

To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. . . . And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services (1991:161).

From our previous mention of the filth and human density of the cities in early Christianity, it is not difficult to conclude that epidemics were widespread and mortality was high. Nor is it hard to infer from the New Testament that the care for the sick, such as leprosy, was a low or non-existent priority for the culture as a whole. In this context, the
miracles which Jesus performed to heal the sick were not only remarkable in how they were performed but who they were performed upon.

From the example and teaching of Jesus, the adherents to Christianity would have had a powerful example and motivation to take care of the sick, both inside and outside of the group. Rodney Stark makes a very pragmatic observation concerning the ratio of Christians to pagans which might have developed as a result of the epidemics severing people from their former attachments:

As mortality mounted during each of these epidemics, large numbers of people, especially pagans, would have lost the bonds that once might have restrained them from becoming Christians. Meanwhile, the superior rates of survival of Christian social networks would have provided pagans with a much greater probability of replacing their lost attachments with new ones to Christians (1991:75).

In the fourth century, the emperor Julian attempted to counteract the Christian charitable work by encouraging the pagan priests to match their benevolence. He wrote: “‘The impious Galileans support not only their own poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us’” (Stark 1991:84). But for all his urging, “there was little or no response because there were no doctrinal bases or traditional practices for them to build upon” (Stark 1991:88).

It is significant to note that Stark is writing as a professor of sociology from the University of Washington, hardly a bastion of conservative Christian values. He chides his fellow professional academics who overlook the role of “doctrine” in the formation of Christian behavior by saying:

Social scientists typically are trained to be suspicious of ‘theological’ or ‘ideological’ explanations and often suppose that these are epiphenomena easily reduced to the ‘real’ causes, which are material in nature. This is true even of some social scientists who specialize in studies of early Christianity.
However... ideas often are critical factors in determining not only individual behavior but, indeed, the path of history. To be more specific, for people in the Greco-Roman world, to be a Christian or a pagan was not simply a matter of ‘denominational preference.’ Rather, the contents of Christian and pagan beliefs were different in ways that greatly determined not only their explanatory capacities but also their relative capacities to mobilize human resources” (Stark 1991:79).

The role of doctrine as it relates to concrete action will be revisited when both individualism and pluralism of modern and post-modern eras are discussed. However, before Christendom emerged in the fourth century which led to wholesale nominalism, Christians were willing to endure very high costs, even martyrdom, in order to be faithful to their common faith and teaching.

Far from weakening the group, mortal pressure from the outside tended to “screen out free riders—those potential members whose commitment and participation would otherwise be low. The costs acts as a nonrefundable registration fees that, as in secular markets, measure seriousness or interest in the product. Only those willing to pay the price qualify” (Stark 1991:177). In short, the perceived value of both the Christian community and doctrine were so high that sacrifice was the norm instead of the exception in the New Testament church.

Summary

In this first chapter we have attempted to understand of the New Testament church through the disciplines of sociology and urban anthropology. To often in the past, “studies of Pauline theology, which are legion, have all but universally neglected the social context and functions of doctrine” (Meeks 1983:164).¹

We found that the “church” (ekklesia) was comprised primarily of “small groups scattered in cities” which were both “intimate and exclusive” and actively engaged “with the larger urban society” (Meeks 1983:190). These cities were relatively small, filthy and tightly

¹ This is because theological study has at times been overly influenced by the modern scientific worldview which attempted to distill truth apart from the environment from which it was produced.
congested, linked by a network of roads which circulated a diversity of people and ideas. Private moments were rare.

Within this urban context, the Christian church was built through communities which were more intimate, homogeneous and missional than their secular and Jewish counterparts. In addition, the early Christian groups were linked together doctrinally through the teachings of Jesus and practically by the care of its members and the broader society. In particular, its teaching to care for the stranger and heal the sick provided a strong impetus for both the survival of its own members and the incorporation of others.

This strong linkage between the conceptual, the communal and the missional provide a model to measure and evaluate the disciple making efforts of the church in history. The next chapter briefly looks at how the New Testament model of the Church was affected by two thousand years of church history.
CHAPTER 2

DISCIPLESHIP IN MODERNITY

Marked by the apparently nominal conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, Christianity would move from the periphery to the center of society. The reverberations of this dramatic movement are still being assimilated and reacted to. This chapter briefly outlines how these developments took place and how they affected the modern era.

The Foundation of the Enlightenment

The dramatic shift from martyrdom to kingdom was propelled by the vacuum created by the wholesale erosion of the philosophical worldview of the Greeks and the political dominance of Rome because of the barbaric invasions. Although both Greece and Rome were leaving the stage as leading actors, their scripts and structures would greatly influence the new world order. In the metamorphosis from Christianity to Christendom, the church synchretized its pure doctrine, which had been kept at such a high price, with the departing Greek philosophy and adjusted its ecclesiological structure to fit the genius of Roman rule.

Having gained the ascendancy, the church attempted to create a Christian civilization out of the ruins of the barbaric invasions. At this point the church faced a most critical question: "How can any society hold together against the forces of disruption without some commonly accepted beliefs about the truth, and—therefore—without some sanctions against deviations which threaten to destroy society? (Newbegin 1989:223).

The church eventually answered that question by replacing the incredible pluralism which once marked the Apostolic age by a single brand which tolerated no dissent. This "led the Church into the fatal temptation to use secular power to enforce conformity to Christian teaching" (Newbegin 1989:223). The sociology of religion has posited that “the capacity of a
“single religious firm to monopolize a religious. economy depends upon the degree to which the state uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy” (Stark 1991:194).

Just as force fused the elements of the state/church alliance in the Holy Roman Empire it was force that tour it apart. “If you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed” (Rev. 13:10). The cohesion of Christendom was shattered by internal disputes which erupted into bloody warfare in the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Whereas armies overcame the long-standing political control of Christendom, the rediscovery of the Western foundations of philosophy overcame the millennia of ecclesiological control. A renewed interest in classicalism in the sixteenth century would lead to the translation of both the Greek philosophers and the New Testament. Newbegin points to this link with the Greek and Roman elements in our culture and not science as the true origin of modernism:

It is often said, or implied, that the dominance of the Christian worldview in western European society was overturned by the rise of modern science, but this seems to be an oversimplification. Graf Reventlow, in his massive work The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of Modernity shows how the attack has its origins, far earlier than the rise of modern science, in the strong humanist tradition which we inherit from the classical Greek and Roman elements in our culture, and which surfaced powerfully in the Renaissance and played a part in the Reformation (1989:1-2).

From the translation and study of ancient Greek and New Testament texts, two vigorous but separate movements would emerge—the humanist tradition as envisioned by the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. The decline of Christendom, which had strongly regulated both public and private life for over one thousand years, meant that the inner and outward life of each individual were now up for re-evaluation. The greatest influence which would shape the lives of individuals in the modern era would be called the Enlightenment.
In a relatively short time, the traditional “Christian” society where everyone’s position within the group was carefully proscribed, was replaced by a modern world whose dominant characteristics "are its thoroughgoing secular nature and its radical anthropocentricity" (Bosch 1995:2). The influences that shaped the new society which was emerging in the sixteenth century succeeded in driving a deep wedge between the public person and the private self.

Thomas Aquinas had envisioned a harmonious synthesis where everyone and everything fitted into a fixed position which could be diagrammed as follows (Bosch 1995:16):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Grace</th>
<th>Church (Pope)</th>
<th>Theology</th>
<th>The Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>State (Emperor)</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>The Human</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the success of science and the rise of independent states would ensure that humanism would supplant Christianity on the top, authoritative tier of culture, Bosch feels that this did not, “of necessity, involve abiding hostility between the Christian faith and science” (1995:16).

According to Bosch, it was the Reformation itself that placed the emerging enthronement of reason in conflict with faith. The negative assessment by the church of the ideals of the Enlightenment ensured that the wedge between private belief and public practice would be driven deep into the emerging concept of the free and autonomous individual.

The following table builds upon what Bosch believes were the “seven cardinal convictions” (1995:5) of the Enlightenment as compared to the traditional society it replaced. (See also Newbegin 1989:7-26). It is clear that the basic movement of the Enlightenment was to separate that which had traditionally been bound to together. The traditional synthesis
of church and state, faith and reason, the past and the present and the group and the individual were polarized by the forces of the Enlightenment.
From early in the life of the church it had been taught that God was revealed both by special and natural revelation. The first was grasped through faith, the later through observation and reason. For a millennia, religion and science were not competing epistemological domains. They were seen as harmonious and complimentary, with theology being the “Queen” and the clear arbitrator of the sciences.

Newbegin cites an interesting premise by Hannah Arendt who attempts to explain how theology as the “Queen of the Sciences” got shaken off of her throne. Arendt contended that it was “the invention of the telescope that made people realize that things are not always what they appear” (1989:17).

At the critical time when the new science was developing it was necessary to reject elements in the traditional teaching of the church. It was necessary to set the actual visibility of the moons of Jupiter through the telescope against the traditional teaching that there could be no moons. In this sense observable facts had to be set against the authority of tradition (Newbegin 1989:43).

This in turn gave rise to skepticism and the whole programme of Descarte to place rationality on the throne where the church and faith once sat. Thus a deepening wedge was pushed between the factual, public world of science and the private world of the individual. To have any credibility whatsoever, believers were forced “to commute between different plausibility structures: when in church, their plausibility structure was determined by the
Christian faith, when in the factory or surgery, it was determined by the mechanistic paradigm" (Bosch 1995:18). Religion no longer explained the world but was regulated to a purely private space which had no real function in the world.

Thus the brave new world of modernity was created—not in the six days of creation but in the dictates of the scientific method. Humanity was to be saved, not by the gospel, but by the steady advancement of science. The god of pure rationality would save Europe from the stagnation of a thousand years of Christendom and the horrors of the Thirty Years War.

Just as the Atlas of ancient mythology was shocked that the world still hung in space after he was released from its burden, so more and more people discovered, “originally to their surprise, that they could ignore God and the church, yet be none the worse for it" (Bosch 1995:15). The tradition of the church was replaced with the tradition of science (Newbegin 1989:47).

The “scientific method,” as developed early in the Enlightenment, was designed to produce consistent, irrefutable facts. Objectivity belonged only in the realm of science. Once an individual stepped outside of science, there was no officially approved method in the religious realm to discover and maintain absolute truth.

Freed from the restrictions of a traditional society where everyone is told what to believe and how to act, the individual was and is still expected to make their own choice. "We live in a do-it-yourself world, in a supermarket where the choice is limitless and determined solely by personal preferences" (Bosch 1995:22). However, as we go up and down the ideological aisles, individuals can stick to their “favorite brand and acclaim its merits in songs of praise; but to insist that everyone else should choose the same brand [as occurs in traditional societies] is unacceptable" (Newbigin 1989:168).

Just how then do all these individuals who have differing beliefs get along with one another? In the communities of the New Testament the Holy Spirit empowered and molded the diverse members of the group together in Christian love. The apparent tolerance of individuals in a pluralistic society is not built on mutual love but by "a coexistence of people
inward-turned, tolerating one another out of mutual indifference" (Sennett 1994:323). A toleration of divergent views can only be successful if all parties agree to a pluralistic worldview. "The diplomatic way to resolve the problem of diverse outlooks is to decree that they all are relative" (Bibby 1997:67).

Not only is pluralism needed to sustain the modern construct of toleration, a society needs to foster a superficiality of relationship. If individuals really don’t know each other or the views of other people, then there will be more of a chance for mutual toleration. According to Sennett, both the organization of and movement in urban space was tailored to accomplish this very fact, of keeping people alone while being together. "Individual bodies moving through urban space gradually became detached from the space in which they moved, and from the people the space contained" (1994:323).

The isolation of the individual in the presence of others was reinforced in very pragmatic ways. Individual seating in the home, at the café and on railways helped the individual to withdraw and think about his own business while in the presence of others. For instance, “the American railroad carriage turned all passengers looking forward, staring at one another's backs rather than faces . . . people had rarely been obliged to sit together in silence for a long time, just staring” (Sennett 1994:339, 344).

Business spaces in the past were geared towards sociability. "The insurance company Lloyd's of London began as a coffeehouse, and its rules marked the sociability of most other urban places; the price of a mug of coffee earned a person the right to speak to anyone in Lloyd's room" (Sennett 1994:345).

In contrast to this, office buildings of today are designed to isolate and not to congregate. With the invention of internal heating and air conditioning, the modern sealed office "isolated buildings from the urban environment. . . . In modern buildings which couple their elevators to underground garages, it is possible for a passively moving body to lose all physical contact” with the other people and the very atmosphere of the city (Sennett 1994:347, 349).
In traditional society the individual was told what to think and what to do. "The individual's place was assured by virtue of conformity to the role or station defined by society" (Shenk 1995:95). Since the Enlightenment the individual is increasingly isolated, with the potential for both unbounded freedom and insecurity. Feeling the transition from the stability of Christendom to the rapid change which would characterize the Enlightenment John Donne in 1611 penned:

'Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone;  
All just supply, and all Relation:  
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,  
For every man alone thinkes he hath got  
To be a Phoenix, and that then can bee  
None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee (Bellah 1996:276).

It is not hard to sense through this poem the deep feelings of insecurity which arose at the beginning of the brave new world of modernity. Perhaps more than any other society at that time, America intentionally embraced rather than turned from the rising ideal of the free individual.

**The Growth of American Individualism**

Just nineteen years after John Donne penned his poem, a group of Massachusetts Bay colonists left Europe and sailed for the promise of freedom in the emerging country of America. Before they disembarked, John Winthrop gathered the pilgrims on board the ship and preached a sermon entitled “A Model of Christian Charity.” During the course of this sermon he warned the group of pursuing their own pleasure. Paraphrasing the Apostle Paul, Winthrop urged them to:

entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of other's necessities . . . we must delight in each other, make other's conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labour and suffer together, always having before our eyes . . . our Community as members of the same Body" (Bellah 1996:xxxv).
Winthrop still belonged to the traditional view that each person was part of a corporate responsibility. However, shortly after this, John Locke began espousing a new society which placed the biological individual-in-nature prior to society (Bellah 1996:143). In the light of history, Winthrop’s appeal to place the group’s interest before self-interest fell on mostly deaf ears. If the Enlightenment provided the philosophical foundations of individualism, then America would be foremost in providing the geographical context.

One of the main reasons people came to America was to escape the “monarchical and aristocratic authority that seemed arbitrary and oppressive to citizens prepared to assert the right to govern themselves . . . . "Freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value" (Bellah 1996:142,23).

This deep desire for freedom from oppressive rule was soon intensely focused on freedom for the individual to think and to act completely independently of others. Although the more extreme types of independence took many years to develop, its general tendencies were clearly felt by Winthrop and other observers of American culture.

Alexis de Tocqueville, when viewing the American scene in the nineteenth century, coined the phrase “The Age of Individualism.” In the second volume of Democracy in America he wrote the following observation about the American society:

Each person behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of others. . . . As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there remains in his mind a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society” (Sennett 1994:323).

"Individualism lies at the very core of American culture" (Bellah 1996:142). It is such an idolized ideal that individuals who are independent are given heroic status. Early in American history, “the yeoman farmer,” who was anti-state and anti-urban, was idealized (Bellah 1996:x). Throughout American history, the “rugged individualist,” those who could “stand on their own two feet” have been highly valued.
Ernst Troeltsch has pointed out that this form of Protestant self-reliance has a strongly anti-civic side. “The state and the larger society are considered unnecessary because the saved take care of themselves” (Bellah 1996:x). And when help is needed, the individual hero is ready to come riding to the rescue:

America is also the inventor of that most mythic individual hero, the cowboy, who again and again saves a society he can never completely fit into . . . And while the Lone Ranger never settles down and marries the local schoolteacher, he always leaves with the affection and gratitude of the people he has helped (Bellah 1996:145).

In America, modern individualism, classical republicanism and biblical religion have long co-existed. One of the great founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson could say, “I am a sect myself,” and the Revolutionary War hero Thomas Paine confidently asserted, “My mind is my church” (Bellah 1996:233).

Although these early expressions of a purely private religion were no doubt the exception and not the rule, the growth of individualism within the American church was progressive. One of the evidences of this steady journey inward was the decline of the nineteenth century camp meeting. An advocate for these regional camp meetings, which gathered people from many churches together, urged those who wanted to stay within their own smaller congregations:

Let those same people come and settle on the ground at the commencement of a camp-meeting, and they will be better acquainted, and form more christian attachments by the time the meeting closes, than they would have formed in many years on the ordinary plan (Schmidt 1989:218).

As individualism grew within the society and church, these annual communions with their ritual, food and fellowship became less attended. The communities from which the holy fairs drew became increasingly secularized. The silent passing of the camp meeting into American lore gave rise of regret by some.

The ascent of individualism, and the waning of religious authority were often noted and often lamented aspects of modernity. The Scot Thomas Carlyle
gave voice to this regret, when he spoke of “the cut-purse and cut-throat Scramble” of nineteenth-century society, “where Friendship, Communion, has become an incredible tradition; and your holiest Sacramental Supper is a smoking Tavern Dinner, with Cook for Evangelist” (Schmidt 1989:216-217).

With the erosion of group life within both the general society and the church, the emphasis on evangelism shifted from assimilation into a group to “personal” conversion. The scientific method was applied to the sawdust trail by Charles Finney's famous Lectures on Revivals. Finney claimed “that his work was a soundly based on scientific laws as any text of physics or engineering, he expostulated on the concrete means of arousing attention and the specific techniques leading to conversions” (Boys 1989:20).

The ideal of rugged individualism of American culture was applied to the spiritual experience. The civil religion of America is not based on the Bible but is built on a type of Jeffersonian self-reliance:

The most quoted ‘Bible verse’ in America is: ‘God helps those how help themselves’; 82 percent believe that is a direct quote from the Bible . . . . In essence, it teaches that we must make things happen on the strength of our own abilities and efforts, and when we prove ourselves capable or succeed in achieving our goals, then God is obliged to bless us (Barna 1998:225).

Being a disciple, as well as becoming an entrepreneur in America "demands personal effort and stimulates great energy to achieve, yet it provides little encouragement for nurturance, taking a sink-or-swim approach to moral development as well as economic success" (Bellah 1996:viii).

One of the greatest achievements of modernity was the creation of the autonomous individual, which prided itself in developing beliefs and practices independent from communities which were often rightly judged as historically oppressive. However, “those who attempt to practice a private, purely personal religion lack means of assessing its value” (Stark 1991:172). Value is always assessed in relationship with something else. For instance, a baseball card’s value can only be assessed in relationship with other cards. A solitary card on a desert island is worth nothing. Its value can only be assessed as it is brought together with other cards.
So it seems to be with religion. The true value of a belief or practice can only be reckoned as we bring that personal understanding into the wider arena of community thought and action. Prior to conversion, almost all the people in a society belong to some community. A full process of conversion not only reconciles the self to God, but brings that person “into a new community . . . however much they experience that event as an individualistic affair” (Banks 1998:17).

The experience of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus is a clear case in point. After a very personal encounter with Christ, he was specifically led by the Lord into the community of faith in Damascus. There are no “disembodied” members in the New Testament church. All are drawn closer together as they approach the great center in Jesus Christ. Having entered and been transformed in community, they are sent forth by the community to transform those outside of the community.

Just how far can the journey inward take within both the society and church in America? A recent sociological survey by Robert Putnam entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" reports “that between 1980 and 1993 the total number of bowlers in America increased by 10 percent, while league bowling decreased by 40 percent” (Bellah 1996:xvi). These questions about the effect of individuality on spirituality are addressed next.

**Being Alone, Together**

This section reviews the research of group spirituality within Canada and the United States by looking closely at the profile of who is coming to church and how individuals are participating in small groups. It will be shown that those who are involved in small group communities in America still retain a large degree of individuality. The rugged individualism which has grown stronger with each generation occurs even when people do meet resulting in “being alone, together.”
Who is Coming to Church?

That the interest and attendance in church and spiritual community has steadily declined is almost self-evident in Europe, Canada and America. Proud cathedrals and churches which were built and filled with faithful congregants now stand nearly empty. Reginald W. Bibby, who has used a variety of solid survey and research tools (1997:xix) to research the church in Canada states:

Mark Twain allegedly once commented on a visit to Montreal that 'One cannot stand on a street in Montreal and throw a brick without breaking a church window.' These days, with weekly attendance coming in at only about 15% in Montreal, chances are pretty good that no one would be hit by the brick (1997:3).

While mere attendance at the weekly worship service does not measure all there is about going to church, it does seem "to be the behavioural prerequisite of people actually seeing themselves as members of a local parish" (Bibby 1997:7).

Churches emptied in Canada because fewer people who were raised in the church returned with each new generation (1997:15) and these were not replaced with individuals with a non-church background (1997:31). "Since 1973, we have assumed that the 70-20-10 distribution for reaffiliation-birth-proselytism means that evangelicals are not adding many outsiders" (Bibby 1997:43).

Bibby goes on to argue that what often is counted for evangelism in some of the churches is the recirculation of the saints. Those who originally appeared as unchurched upon closer inspection “are passed on to the next evangelical church as recycled 'sinners' who, in our research, have been counted as 'saints'" (1997:44). Bibby also found that switching churches does not translate automatically to an increase of involvement. “Switching may look like evangelism and sound like evangelism. But for all the motion and commotion, it usually is not evangelism" (1997:36).

This “circulation of the saints” finding by Bibby was questioned in a 1991 article in a study of new adherents to the Vineyard Christian Fellowship: Like Bibby, these researches
found that nearly eighty percent “came from other conservative churches” (Perrin and Mauss 1991:102). However, "When church background is defined as upbringing, the proportion of VCF recruits coming from other conservative backgrounds is reduced by more than half" (Perrin 1991:102). The article goes on to postulate that the original finding of Dean Kelley that people are attracted to more conservative churches remains valid when the church affiliation for the entire life is taken into account.

Bibby found that although Canadians are not showing up at church, they still exercise a latent identification when rites of passage such as weddings, a christening or a funeral comes about. "They might be out of sight, but their religion is not out of mind" (1997:168). Indeed, Bibby did indeed find that Canadians are "very much in the market for the things that religion historically has been about" (1997:177).

However, individuals in Canada are not even checking out what food the church has to offer, “because they don't expect to find the kind of food they want. . . . It's as if McDonald's Wendy's and Burger King are all going under at a time in history when Canadians love hamburgers" ” (Bibby 1997:177,179). In short, the spiritual food the church’s are offering is not appealing to the spiritual starvation that is rampant in the society.

Bibby, in quoting Clifford Longley’s summary of the public withdrawal from the state church observes that: "'The English have withdrawn their consent to the establishment of the Church of England . . . not by crowding into the cold streets to shout but by not crowding into its cold churches to sing and pray’" (1997:111).

In contrast to the state supported churches of Canada and England which exist primarily to service their regular and new customers, "American religious groups aggressively compete with each other in their pursuit of truth” (Bibby 1997:185).

A very recent Gallup poll found that there has been a dramatic increase of spiritual hunger in America: “The percentage of Americans who say they feel the need for spiritual growth has surged twenty-four points in just four years—from 58% in 1994 to 82% in 1998” (Gallup and Lindsay 1999:1).
When asked whether this modern soul fascination was authentic Martin Marty answered, “The hunger is always authentic . . . It’s just that you can feed it with Twinkies or broccoli” (Gallup and Jones 2000:29). The most recent surveys seem to indicate that Americans have been feasting on the former.

The broad interest in religion has by and large not been translated into a deep, transforming community of faith. Gallup and Lindsey found that despite their profession, America’s faith tends to be non-transformational, uninformed and independent (1999:3). The most recent research concludes that “faith in America is broad but not deep” (Gallup and Jones 2000:128).

Certainly a deeper New Testament community of faith, is not to be found in the nominal church member with their minimal commitment and contact as outlined by Bibby and other observers of the American religious scene. The dramatic emergence of small groups within the last generation has provided a window of opportunity to counteract the steady rise of individualism within the society. How faith is being both deepened and surprisingly hindered by the current small group movement which does demand greater commitment and contact between people is the task of the next section.

Who is Involved in Small Groups?

Perhaps there is no more fruitful place to search for New Testament community than in the small group movement which has emerged as a significant and deeply studied phenomena within American life. Robert Wuthnow, Professor of Social Sciences and the Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University coordinated the efforts of fifteen scholars in a three year study which sampled more than a thousand members and nine-hundred non-members of small groups with extensive survey materials (1994:367-375; 395-421).
"According to this survey, exactly 40 percent of the adult population of the United States claims to be involved in a 'small group that meets regularly and provides caring and support for those who participate in it'" (Wuthnow 1994:45).

In an extensive footnote, Wuthnow acknowledges the skepticism of some who might question this high degree of involvement by saying that as many as a quarter of the respondents might not have a high level of commitment and the input from other surveys which place the involvement of around 29 percent (1994:426-427). Even if the more conservative number of roughly one in three are involved in small groups, it is a very significant percentage within the context of the individualism within North America.

In pairing the demographic information reveals the following profile of who is involved in small groups:

"Women are more likely to be involved in small groups than are men in all age categories and in all regions of the country. Older people are somewhat more likely to be involved in small groups than are younger people, controlling for gender, education, and region. College graduates are more likely than those with lower levels of education to be involved in small groups, controlling for other factors" (1994:375).

In addition, those who say that their groups are “extremely important” to them are "women, people between ages 35 and 49, blacks, and those in the lowest income brackets" (1994:376).

According to the survey, nearly everyone in our society wants to be able to share their deepest feelings, be in an accepting environment and have loyal friends you can count on. (1994:53-54). It is not surprising then that "the most distinctive feature of the contemporary small-group movement is its emphasis on support" (1994:261).

Eighty-two percent of those involved in small groups said that the group made them feel like they were not alone and seventy-two percent reported that the group gave them encouragement when they were feeling down (1994:171). On the other hand, the majority of those not involved in small groups said that "they already have support in more naturally occurring settings" such as an informal circle of friends (1994:183-184).
As a sociologist, Wuthrow is very aware that small groups play a role in both influencing and being influenced by the wider culture. In the former category of influencing the wider society “small, relatively fluid, low-budget groups have an adaptive advantage in a heterogeneous environment such as the contemporary United States” (1994:23). People can survive the trauma of moving to different parts of the country, leave a spouse or change jobs because they know that any number of diverse groups will be there to support them.

On the other hand, our society’s core values of freedom of individuality have also affected the small group movement by redefining the meaning of community:

Community is what people say they are seeking when they join small groups. Yet the kind of community they create is quite different from the communities in which people have lived in the past. These communities are more fluid and more concerned with the emotional states of the individual (1994:3).

The ambiguity between community and individualism is reflected in the self identities of group members. Whereas eighty-nine percent described themselves as “a people person” fifty-eight percent identified themselves as “a very private person” (1994:192).

It is obvious that because of the powerful force of individualism which has laid at the very foundation of American culture, members of small groups, “are often faced with dilemma of wanting a more solid, communal form of religious commitment and at the same time picking up the privatized, relativistic messages that infuse their groups from the wider culture” (1994:57). How this duality between individuality and community is practically handled in groups is outlined by the following remarks:

What some have called 'privatized' values or 'individualistic' spirituality is institutionalized in the norms of many small groups. We tell ourselves that faith is essentially a matter of personal discovery and that values are not absolute, universal standards, but discretionary matters about which we can have our own opinions. We then carry these views into our groups as well. A written text of some kind may provide a common framework, but the values it embodies are so general that everyone can read something different into it (1994:200).
According to Robert Bellah, this shadow of religious pluralism has been cast over the American consciousness since the colonial times: "The American pattern of privatizing religion while at the same time allowing it some public functions has proven highly compatible with the religious pluralism that has characterized America from the colonial period and grown more and more pronounced" (1996:225).

In summary, although the current small group phenomenon is providing critical emotional support to about a third of the society, Wuthnow states that the survey data is unclear "whether the deepening spirituality that people experience in small groups encourages them to move away” from a private and individual view of religion (1994:252).

It is clear that small groups in America have trouble escaping from the strong gravity of individualism which permeates our society. People tend to think and act as individuals when they are involved with other people. The next section looks at how the practice of the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer and service affect the lives of small group members.

Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines in Small Groups

“Undiscipled church members present one of the greatest challenges facing the church, not only in the West but around the world” (Gibbs 2000:231). If we generally define discipleship as nurturing faith through disciplined Bible study and prayer so that it can be shared in service to others, then how are small groups doing?

Generally speaking, 76 percent among members of Bible study groups had joined their group in order to become “more disciplined” in their spiritual lives. (Wuthnow 1994:220). The Protestant work ethic of individual responsibility, hard work and achievement have influenced both the secular culture in America and “our perception of spiritual journeys as well" (Wuthnow 1994:225).

Being disciplined in one's spiritual life (Wuthnow 1994:17) and commitment to the group (Wuthnow 1994:51) are both viewed from a very positive point of view. Therefore,
“if spirituality is like learning to play the piano, then churches can perform a legitimate role by providing piano teachers, lesson books, and places to hold recitals" (Wuthnow 1994:236)."

On the surface it would appear that small groups provide an ideal environment to grow disciples. The commitment level is high and the need for discipline is affirmed. But when the survey actually investigated what was occurring within the groups a more ambiguous picture emerges. Take for instance the knowledge of the Bible.

Group members whose spirituality has been deepened by their participation were no more likely than other members to give the correct answer to a factual question that was included in the survey . . . . Thus we must question what kind of biblical understanding is being fostered in small groups . . . . The weekly Bible study may have lasted for two hours, but only fifteen minutes of the time was devoted to studying the Bible (Wuthnow 1994:243).

It is evident that although groups encourage people to think about spiritual truths “they do little to increase biblical knowledge of their members" (Wuthnow 1994:7). For instance, nearly forty-one percent of the participants in small groups felt that Jesus was born in Jerusalem and nineteen percent thought that the book of Acts was in the Old Testament (Wuthnow 1994:244). While a more thorough knowledge of the Bible does not in any way guarantee spiritual growth, it is hard to formulate a plan for discipleship which does not incorporate an intimate relationship with Jesus as nurtured by the Scriptures.

In addition to Bible study, prayer is an important spiritual discipline. Praying together was one of the things participants in groups liked best. Prayer requests were often solicited and answers to prayer were brought to the group. Instead of relying on an ordained member of the clergy, prayer is democratized as many members of the group participated and felt a special intimacy with God.

If "feeling closer to God was by far the most strongly related" (Wuthnow 1994:385), factor in influencing the faith of members in small groups then prayer probably had a significant part in generating that feeling. Although the generation of group feeling based on a shared spiritual discipline is a wonderful dimension for any group’s life, a biblical
definition of faith is based on realities that are not always seen or felt (Heb. 11:1). True discipleship must be grounded in a faith that operates apart from feeling, apart from the answer to the promised blessing which is sometimes delayed for faith’s sake. Groups that can encourage faith in the midst of trial and testing are truly golden in worth.

Besides nurturing their faith by Bible study and prayer, members of small groups have participated in service for others. First, it should not be overlooked that the support previously noted by members of small groups for one another is an important seedbed for extending that support to those outside of the group. Satisfied customers are always the best advertisers. In Wuthnow’s research, seventy-five percent of those participating in small groups had invited a friend to attend the group and forty-four percent had been responsible for another person joining the group. In addition, one in nine had been responsible for starting a new group. (1994:338).

The findings further show that small group members tend to not participate in traditional areas of evangelism but depend on being a silent influence.

"Group members do say they are sharing their faith, but they are not drawn to the formal programs of evangelism that many clergy advocate) knocking on neighbors doors, inviting their friends to church, or perhaps eavesdropping to find poor troubled unbelievers can help). They are not trying to learn techniques for talking to the unconverted or even to gain logical arguments to use in defense of their faith. Rather, they are trying to incorporate some sense of spirituality into their lives so that it will shine through naturally" (1994:246).

Active participation in the group also generally corresponded to being more active in other volunteer endeavors (1994:391). Additionally, there was also a very positive corollary between what story was studied and the effect on relationships and behavior. For instance, "one's love toward other people had increased if the group was discussing the Good Samaritan story, while the best predictor of having relationships healed was discussing the Prodigal Son story" (Wuthnow 1994:391).
While it is true that "some small groups merely provide occasions for individuals to focus on themselves in the presence of others" (Wuthnow 1994:6), groups also seem to generate a significant amount of internal and external ministry. It would seem that at least a good number of group members believe that, "shattered, fragmented lives can only be rebuilt in the company of others" (Wuthnow 1994:168).

In another study Wuthnow found that “people who said they feel it is important to develop their own religious beliefs independently of any church were less likely to value caring for the needy than people who took issue with this popular form of religious individualism” (1991:12). That is to say, private spirituality did not readily show itself in public service. On the other hand, “Comparisons made possible by other studies also suggest that spirituality begins to move people towards being compassionate only when a threshold of involvement in some kind of collective religious activity has been reached”(1991:13).

In other words, caring flows more readily out of being a part of a caring community than going it alone. A discipling program must therefore include a dynamic group process in order to generate an abundance of caring which will bless those both on the inside and outside.

Summary

The era of Christendom, which would follow the New Testament period, would develop a unity of doctrine and community. These two commodities were forcefully brought into the very heart of the Holy Roman Empire. The Protestant Reformation and modernity were a reaction against this monolithic process. It rightly stressed that every person should be freely able to read and interpret the Bible and the book of nature.

Perhaps an unforeseen result of this liberation from the constraints of the past removed both the individual from the community and beliefs from the normative. In Canada individuals are increasingly looking for spiritual answers outside the walls of the formal
church setting. In America the ideal of freedom for the individual has often conflicted with the goals of community and mission.

The fluidity and ubiquity of small groups have greatly aided in meeting the needs of individuals in a transitional society. Small groups have also been infected with a fair degree of individualism where people are able to seek for personal fulfillment while being with others.

The spiritual disciplines, although practiced, have at times been superficial in nature. The Bible is not studied so much for content but to provide discussion points for subjective speculations. On the positive side, people who belong in groups greatly value prayer and being part of a community increases participation in ministry.

The next section will give an overview of postmodernism and how it will affect the making of disciples. However, it can already be felt that if the church is struggling in the choppy waters of modernism then how will it fare in the roaring rapids of post-modernism?
CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLESHIP IN POST-MODERNITY

That we are entering a new and uncharted territory in almost all areas of life is succinctly stated by Hans Kung who "depicts the contemporary world as post-Eurocentric, postcolonial, postimperial, postsocialist, postindustrial, postpatriarchal, postideological, and postconfessional" (Bosch 1995:1). The optimism which accompanied the rationality of the Enlightenment has been replaced with “pessimism and skepticism" (Gibbs 2000:23). It has been increasingly felt that “the rarified atmosphere of pure rationality” has not provided “enough nourishment for the human spirit” (Newbegin 1989:213). How the church has responded to this spiritual hunger is outlined below.

Postmodernism and the Church

As it is being released from the influence of rationality, postmodernism explores a dizzying array of ideas and images. A common paradigm for this jumping from one surface to another is television channel-hopping which involves “a series of disconnected images, each in its own present, and each enjoyed for its place in a surface of images with no narrative structure and no map" (Sampson 1994:39).

This surfing of diverse surfaces is in distinct contrast to the pre-modernist work of art which spoke with a single narrative voice like Balzac or addressed a single visual center like Leonardo da Vinci. Such unity is increasingly abandoned.

The modernist work—T.S. Eliot's Waste Land, Joyce's Ulysses, or Picasso's Guernica to take three examples—still aspires to unity, but this unity, if that is what it is, has been (is still being?) constructed, assembled from fragments, or shocks, or juxtapositions of difference. It shifts abruptly among a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, materials. Continuity is disrupted, and with enthusiasm (Gitlin 1989:69).
There are many metaphors and images that have been used to compare the traditional, modern and postmodern periods. These are summarized below:

### TABLE 3
COMPARING THE TRADITIONAL, MODERN AND POSTMODERN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Postmodern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN SOCIETY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority from</td>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Within</td>
<td>Everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>By Birth</td>
<td>By Education</td>
<td>By Relational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning by</td>
<td>Precedent</td>
<td>Propositions</td>
<td>Unpredictability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change initiated from</td>
<td>Above</td>
<td>The Center</td>
<td>From the Periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change brings</td>
<td>Disaster</td>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>Cynicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Group</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Committees</td>
<td>Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating</td>
<td>Sofa</td>
<td>Bucket Seats</td>
<td>Circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WITH THE SENSES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Flat/One Dimension</td>
<td>Three Dimension</td>
<td>Multi Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Microscope</td>
<td>Kaleidoscope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Clock</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>One Channel</td>
<td>Channel Viewing</td>
<td>Channel Hopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN THE CHURCH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>The Father</td>
<td>The Son</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Orientation</td>
<td>Christendom</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Pre-Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/Society</td>
<td>Maximized</td>
<td>Contextualized</td>
<td>Minimalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>At Birth</td>
<td>Before Eighteen</td>
<td>After Eighteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Growth</td>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>Disciple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
<td>Monasticism</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Missionary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“Postmodernism appears to have been first used by Federico de Onis in the 1930’s but most current usage dates from a 1960s reaction against high modernism in art and literature” (Sampson 1994:30). Since that time, the term, as amorphous as the period it attempts to describe, has grown to include a wide array of thought and practices. The church, being immersed in society, has itself been impacted by Post-modern thought and other forces. The net affect of these powerful influences has been to push the church to the very edge of society.

At the brink of the twenty-first century, the king who knew not Joseph is the collective culture of which we are a part. The combined impact of the Information Age, postmodern thought, globalization, and racial-ethnic pluralism that has seen the demise of the grand American story also has displaced the historic role of the church has played in that story. As a result, we are seeing the marginalization of the institutional church (Regele 1995:182).

With the demise of Christendom nearly four hundred years ago, the church has been steadily moving from the center to the periphery of modern society. The symbiotic relationship that has shaped both the church and society during the modern era is now being radically redefined by our increasingly secularized culture. While it might be easy to lament the decreasing role of the church in society, other voices have been raised which shed a ray of real hope for the future of the church.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rev. Walter Hobhouse outlined the ramifications of the church’s movement into the edge of modern culture by saying:

Long ago I came to believe that the great change in relations between the Church and the World which began with the conversion of Constantine is not only a decisive turning point in Church history, but is also the key to many of the practical difficulties of the present day, and that the Church of the future is destined more and more to return to a condition of things somewhat like that which prevailed in the Ante-Nicene Church; that is to say, that instead of pretending to be a co-extensive with the World, it will confess itself the Church of a minority, will accept a position involving a more conscious antagonism with the World, and will, in return, regain some measure of its former coherence (1911:xix).
Hobhouse’s thesis was that the character of the church was fundamentally altered by the coercive and universal character of the Christendom model. The clear distinction and tension between the church and the world were erased as well as its sense of mission and commitment. Some of the negative aspects of the Christendom model were then carried, often unsuspectedly over to the modern era by sustaining an overly symbiotic relationship between church and society.

In his book, American Evangelicalism, Embattled and Thriving, Christian Smith postulates that in a pluralistic society such as our own, religious groups will be relatively stronger which “create both clear distinction from and significant engagement and tension with other relevant outgroups, short of becoming genuinely countercultural” (Smith 1998:118-119).

It would seem that both Hobhouse and Smith agree that a tension needs to exist between the church and the world in order for it to be genuine. One might well ask how well American Evangelicalism has done at balancing the need for both distinctiveness and engagement.

Smith himself admits that although Evangelicals are a thriving religious tradition within the context of a pluralistic society, "it does not fare so well when it comes to achieving its goal of transforming the world for Christ" (1998:178). Three of the major reasons Smith himself puts forth for this lack of mission effectiveness are the negative ways Evangelicals are viewed by others (1998:179-187); the limits of the personal influence strategy as defined by individualism (1998:187-210) and the upholding of the twin ideals of absolute truth and freedom of choice which generally results in an accepted pluralism (1998:210-216).

Certainly many real dilemmas for Evangelicals and other groups within the society emerge from these findings. On the one hand, Evangelicals are criticized by the public for

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3 One wonders if there is not a slight degree of difference between Hobhouse’s urging of the church to become “a more conscious antagonism with the World” and Smith’s caution not to become “genuinely countercultural.”
being “too verbally or publicly expressive about their faith” (Smith 1998:184) yet Smith’s theory cautions believers not to become “genuinely countercultural.”

In addition, the personal influence theory precludes most Evangelicals from talking “about the need for individual believers to yield their own interests and concerns in order to unite behind one common project, campaign, program, or position” (Smith 1998:190). Finally, the value of individual freedom usually reigned in and subdued “that faith-based social and political activism that absolutism tended to encourage” (Smith 1998:216).

Evangelicals then are constantly placed in a bind in our society. They have to witness in order to get their message across, but they can’t speak too strongly or they believe nobody will listen. They strongly believe in individual conversion and effort but have to work as a group to accomplish their goals. And finally, the freedom of individual choice which generates pluralism has precedent value over the absolute truth of the Bible.

Smith rejects the notion that these ambivalences arose out of “external” secularization. Instead, he posits that principles such as individualism “are fundamentally the outworkings of the internal subcultural structures of the evangelical tradition” (1998:217). In other words, although an increasingly non-Christian society poses a challenge for the church, its main impediment is ontological not sociological.

It is self-evident that our current ecclesiological self-understanding of the church and its attendant missiology have been shaped by historical processes. “The ancient cathedral spires continue to cast long shadows” (Shenk 1999:130). The hopeful point that Hobhouse and others make is that historical processes are now pushing the church out from the center of society and away from the shadows of Christendom.

Modernity and now Post-modernity have pushed the church back to the position it originally occupied in New Testament times. The church has increasingly become just one voice among the many vying for the public attention. It finds itself back where it started from—back to square one. Eddie Gibbs has developed a most helpful diagram which outlines the changing position of the church in society:
TABLE 4
THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN RELATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Position</th>
<th>Modern Position</th>
<th>Postmodern Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shenk agrees with the flow of the above diagram by saying, “From the fourth century onward the church had increasingly enjoyed a position of privileged power. It had come to depend heavily on Western culture in the way it conceived its role vis-a-vis the world, a view that contrasted with first-century missionaries” (Shenk 1995: 35)

The influence of Christendom persisted in the modern symbiotic position of the church and society. As was noted by Wuthnow and affirmed by Smith, church and society have both continued to shape one another. For instance, the “Protestant work ethic” focused the energies of both the modern church and modern capitalism within North America. Within this context it has been natural for the church to adopt some of the entrepreneurial models from the business world into its past and current practices.

Some have noted that the recent rise of the consumer-oriented mega-church movement have not adequately dealt with the underlying theological suppositions of a true biblical lifestyle or evangelism. “We hypothesize that the church in modern culture has succumbed to syncretism in pursuit of evangelization by its uncritical appropriation of the assumptions and methodologies offered by modern culture” (Shenk 1995:56). The emphasis of technique or the “how to” is often not sufficiently grounded or critiqued by biblical theology.
In some respects, the modern church has followed the wider society in creating a community of consumers. "The starting point for proponents of the marketing concept is the consumer" (Bibby 1997:222). "Goods are valued for what they mean as much for their use and people find meaning in the very act of consumption. . . . There is no subject in the self, only a subject on the shelf" (Sampson 1994:31,44). This search for self-fulfillment through the catering of goods and programs has caused some churches to mirror the wider society by spending more on itself than on ministry to others (Shenk 1995:74-75).

Furthermore, when the church does look outside its doors, it at times uses similar mass-media techniques in order to appeal to the consumer who is looking for a supermarket approach to spiritual fulfillment. However, these "marketing insights and tools will prove inadequate as North America moves still further into its postmodern, post-Christian and neopagan phase" (Gibbs 2000:37). Marketing must be expanded to include an incarnational and contextualized witness:

Churches cannot stand apart from society and invite people to come to them on their terms. Rather, churches must go to people where they are and communicate in terms that will make sense to them, addressing the issues that shape their lives and speaking their language (Gibbs 2000:39).

If the current models being used by churches are inadequate both theologically and practically, then where can the church turn to pattern its life and practice? The surprising answer is not in the turning to a new model but a returning to the original model: "Indeed we may find that the most helpful models might be drawn from the first 150 years of the Christian church, when it began as a movement with neither political power nor social influence within a pluralistic environment" (Gibbs 2000:11).

The return to the New Testament model is not without its challenges. The changes to the very core of church life are "deep-rooted, comprehensive, complex, unpredictable and

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4 This is reflected in the “felt needs” approach of many current evangelistic church programs which have a tendency never to proclaim the full message of abandoning all for the cross of Jesus, even when the consumer is joined to the church. Bibby seems to insinuate that the American church has followed the capitalistic development of production, sales and marketing (1997:221).
global in their ramifications" Furthermore, “within many congregations, groups exist that represent each of these three mindsets: traditional, modern and postmodern. It is no wonder that church leaders find it hard to secure consensus" (Gibbs 2000:19,20).

Just as true conversion is not a mere fixing of the old but a total transformation of the person, the old wineskins of a truncated ecclesiology will not be able to hold the new wine of postmodern mission. What was needed in the New Testament and still is needed today is an appreciation of the resurrected life of Jesus Christ in the heart of the individual, the church and society.

"At the core of Jesus' message is the insistence that unless there is first a death, there can be no life. Unless we say no to our self-will, we cannot know the depth of God's will; unless we turn away from following our own way, we cannot know God's way; unless we confess our sin, we cannot know God's forgiveness and his gift of righteousness; unless we are willing to die to self, we cannot know our true selves; unless we die, we cannot discover the life of God" (Regele 1995:18).

How the New Testament can inform the transition and return of our current communities of faith to the primitive dynamism of the church is the subject of the next section.

The Missionary Nature of the Church

It is obvious from the above discussion that the church which emerged from Christendom did not fully succeed in reclaiming the New Testament prerogatives of mission and community. The current forces which are now pushing the church further to the periphery have been seen by some as an opportunity for the church to reevaluate its position in light of the Bible and history.

The fourth and twentieth centuries form bookends marking transition points of the history of the church. Just as the fourth century adoption of Christianity by Constantine forced the church to struggle with its self-understanding as the new center of the culture, twentieth century Christians must now struggle to understand the meaning of their social location in a decentered world" (Roxburgh 1997:7-8).
The following diagram summarizes the historical position of the church in relationship to society from the New Testament times to the present.

![Diagram of the historical position of the church, society, and mission]

**Figure 1**

THE HISTORICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH, SOCIETY AND MISSION

1) The New Testament

In his book, The Missionary Nature of the Church, Johannes Blauw clearly shows that the Great Commission expressed the continuity of God’s universal concern which He began with the promise to bless all the nations through Abraham (1962:19). The community of disciples is formed “for the express purpose of continuing” the mission of Jesus (Shenk 1999:7). The Great Commission envisions mission and disciple-making as being at the heart of the church.

The Great Commission is addressed to the community of disciples and not to individuals. It outlines what shape their converted lives are to take in the light of Christ’s sacrificed, resurrected and glorified life. As such, the Great Commission is not only a missional statement, it “is a foundational ecclesiological statement” (Shenk 1995:89). The young church was sent forth to reproduce the community of faith which was begun by Jesus and sustained by the presence of the Spirit. The tiny community was commissioned to
leaven the broader society with its unique beliefs, dynamic faith, infectious love and community.

2) Christendom

As has already been noted, the Christendom model of church may be characterized as “church without mission” (Shenk 1995:35). As the church moved to the heart of society by using the coercive power of the state to support and extend her influence, every person was under the long shadow of the church from the cradle to the grave.

The Great Commission was seen as being fulfilled during the Apostolic era and no longer had any relevance for the nominally converted citizens of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther and Calvin, who fought against the tenets and activities of Christendom, were themselves influenced by this view and argued that the commission was only binding upon the apostles whose office had been discontinued (Boer 1961:18-20).

3) Modernity

Carey’s essay An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens (1792) argued that the Great Commission was not restricted to the apostles and the modern missionary enterprise was launched. As the modern church emerged into a more global society, the missionary impetus was reborn.

The primary focus of mission was "an emphasis on territory; that is, the territory of heathendom versus the territory of Christendom, on "going" as the imperative rather than on 'making disciples,' mission defined as what happens 'out there” (Shenk 1995:89). The result of this narrowing of the Great Commission has been to place mission at the periphery of the church’s concern.

The legacy that Christendom bequeathed to the church was effectively to reduce it to the status of an institution for the care of the faithful. When missionary witness is reserved for the few who are sent to faraway places, and when Christian existence is understood mainly as ensuring one's own
salvation, the ecclesial reality has been distorted and the church trivialized by reason of being disconnected from its raison d'etre (Shenk 1999:16).

The modern study and training in theology has revealed this same tendency to place mission on the sideline. The study of theology was standardized by F.D.E. Schliermacher who established the 'fourfold pattern' of theological education, namely, the disciplines of biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical (or pastoral) theology. Within this schema, theory and practice were often divorced from another.5

Mission became a segmented part of the theological agenda. Hence, on the Continent, "only those interested in 'overseas' work or in exotic theologies” took the courses relating to mission (Bosch 1995:32). Mission was construed in terms of who needs to be won to the church but not its “very nature” (Bosch 1995:31).

Since ecclesiology was largely divorced from its missional intent, it also suffered. Like a lake which is cut off from its river, the doctrine of the church was severed from the flow of mission and dried up in the schema of most systematic theologies. "When theology becomes disconnected from its origin, it is no longer nurtured by its true source (Shenk 1999:9).

"If ecclesiology has been largely stored in the pantry of the house built by theologians, mission hardly got a foot in the door" (Shenk 1995:42). Theologians who have lost the Pauline focus of nurturing the faith of real believers in real places, “have ignored the modern missionary movement, choosing instead to maintain a steady provincial and intramural focus” (Shenk 1995:43).6

4) Post-Modernity

5 This is hardly understandable given the fact that Paul apparently had no problem combining theological and missiological concerns.

6 With the advancement of Post-modernity, which is pushing the discussion of traditional theology even more to the edge of the public’s concern, it is difficult to see how truly relevant traditional theological discussion can be.
As was discussed above, the postmodern church is returning to the same peripheral status it had in the New Testament. For this reason, “our western culture will require that we approach this frontier in missional rather than pastoral terms” (Shenk 1995:91). "The church needs to move from the Constantinian model—which presumed a churched culture—to an apostolic model designed to penetrate the vast unchurched segments of society" (Gibbs 2000:187). “The day of the professional minister in over. The day of the missionary pastor has come” (Callahan 1990:4).

As the church has unintentionally moved from the center to the edge of society, mission must intentionally return from the edge to the center of the church. This begins with the clear understanding that since "God is a missionary God, God's people are missionary people" (Bosch 1995:32). Since mission is the center of God’s concern it should become the center of the church’s concern as well. God’s primary focus is not theoretical, administrative, but redemptive. Mission must be thought of in ontological terms for the church.

To be authentic, mission must be thoroughly theocentric. It begins in God's redemptive purpose and will be completed when that purpose is fulfilled. The God-given identity of the church thus arises from its mission. This order of priority is foundational. Yet for some sixteen centuries Christians have been taught to think of church as the prior category and mission as one among several functions of the church (Shenk 1999:7).

Just as Jesus warned his disciples against putting fresh patches on old wineskins, the church, if it is to survive, must be prepared to make some radical changes in the face of rapid developments. "The issue is not simply one of ecclesiastical reengineering. Rather we are talking about a radically different way of being the church" (Gibbs 2000:219).

Unless the church of the West begins to understand this, and unless we develop a missionary theology, not just a theology of mission, we will not achieve more than merely patch up the church. We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology, not just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the missio Dei (Bosch 1995:33).
Discipleship in Post-modernity

It is clear from the above discussion that the church needs to be radically reformulated into a mission-oriented and disciple-making community of faith in a Post-modern world. Some of the steps needed in order to fulfill the Great Commission includes the intentional forming of discipleship building communities. The raw materials for this building must come from the architectural blueprint of the New Testament. Once the sketches are in hand, workers must be trained and new methods developed to build on the changing grounds of the Post-modern world. Finally, tools are needed to help measure the effectiveness of the effort to reproduce disciples. The next four sections briefly outline how disciples are to be made in the Post-modern world.

Community

If the church is to go forth into the world to make disciples in obedience to the Great Commission, then it is expedient that Christ’s body of believers must first be discipled themselves. After all, the Great Commission was given at the very end of Matthew at the culmination of Christ’s personal and intensive discipling efforts. "It was to people who were themselves disciples that Jesus gave the Great Commission to disciple the nations. The implication is clear—it takes a disciple to make a disciple" (Gibbs 2000:230).

The building of true discipleship communities within the evangelical tradition has been deterred by placing a premium on individual, personal conversion which has often been seen as an "event, to the neglect of an understanding of conversion as a lifelong process" (Gibbs 2000:231).

Blended with this misunderstanding of conversion is the reality that it takes so much time and effort to win someone to Christ in our society, that there are very little resources left to properly grow the new converts. The same can certainly be said of foreign missionary work as well. “Protestant missionaries have gone out with the earnest desire to win souls for Christ, but with very little idea of what is to happen to the souls when they have been won” (Neill 1970:109).
For the above reasons and many more, “undiscipled church members present one of the greatest challenges facing the church, not only in the West but around the world” (Gibbs 2000:231). If both church members and would-be members are to be discipled, then the very nature of the church must be rethought of in light of the Great Commission (Shenk 1995:90). Instead of discipledship becoming "compartmentalized and marginalized from the life of the church” (Gibbs 2000:135), where the soul-winning and soul-keeping is done by special departments through special people, discipledship must be woven into the life and substance of the church.

The challenge of converting the churches which are currently filled with relatively autonomous members into a discipledship community will demand more than merely adding a training seminar, a staff person, an agenda item or small group. Adding another wineskin to the already over-burdened backs of pastors and churches is not the answer. I fully concur with the radical thinking of Eddie Gibbs view:

> We are not here reemphasizing the need for small groups, which have often been overlaid on already over-full and over-demanding church calendars. Rather we are arguing for basic communities to become the very building blocks on which the church is built and is able to expand (2000:232).

The practical ramifications for restructuring the church along these lines are two fold. First of all, the leadership of the church must clearly see that anytime a group of members comes together, the promise of Jesus to meet in the midst of His people has the potential of being fulfilled.

In the book of Matthew Jesus promised to meet with His people when they are burdened with both the internal (Mt. 18:1-20) and external ministry (Mt. 28:17-20) of the church. In the former instance, Jesus promises to meet with the two or three who have gathered together to seek and save those “little ones” who have been hurt and become as lost sheep. In the latter case, Christ has promised to be with His church as they go out to disciple the “other ones” or the nations.
The Book of Acts clearly shows that the greatest movements of the Spirit were a result of the worshipping community of disciples. This includes Pentecost (Acts 2); and the healing of the paralytic, with the subsequent trial and release of Peter and John (Acts 3-4). In some ways it would be hard to differentiate in the early Book of Acts a prayer meeting from a board meeting.

Unfortunately today this is not the case. In some ways the Church has followed the Enlightenment which divided what God had originally joined together. First of all the spiritual has been divorced from the practical. “The modern tendency to separate the spiritual from the practical is played out in the church when decision-making groups are divorced from the disciple-making groups” (Gibbs 2000:232).

In 1991 Roberta Hestenes wrote a book entitled Turning Committees Into Communities where she urged Christian leaders to have a more broader view of committee work. Most leaders at that time knew that committees were draining the life out of most denominations and attempted to counteract that tendency trying to transform committees into teams.

However, “in 1998, Hestenes did a tape for the Pastor’s Update from Fuller Theological Seminary in which she realizes how foolish to think of turning a committee into a team” (Easum 2000:132). This is because most of the leaders merely changed the name and not the very structure of the group experience. Easum gives a helpful comparison between committees and teams (2000132-133):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Command and Control Committees</th>
<th>Permission-Giving Teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committees are elected</td>
<td>Individuals are Called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committees are Nominated</td>
<td>Leaders Invite Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Groups</td>
<td>End When Task is Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May or May Not Have a Mission</td>
<td>Have a Clear Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Not Autonomous</td>
<td>Are Autonomous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to Clear All Actions</td>
<td>Are Free to Act Within Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Not Accountable for Results</td>
<td>Are Accountable for Results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second way in which the church has followed the influence of the Enlightenment has to been to so individualize the religious experience that most groups are more concerned "with the inward journey of faith than the outward venture of communicating that faith in all its dimensions. In contrast to this introspective model, we find in the New Testament that discipleship is linked to apostleship" (Gibbs 2000:133).

The true remedy for bringing ministry into the small group experience is not merely to patch it on to the existing structure. Perhaps it could be said that people are not ministering because their spiritual cups are not overflowing. Before the abounding in ministry there must be an abiding in the spiritual disciplines. The “lucky-dip approach” to Bible study (Gibbs 2000:134) needs to be deepened. Our sharing, prayer and support of one another needs to be more intentional, intimate and sustained.

Practicing the disciplines, both apart and together will promote a more authentic worship which will then generate a more dynamic witness. If it is true that “worship is the wellspring of our witness” (Gibbs 2000:155), then we need to enhance this aspect of life whenever we are alone or gathered together.

It cannot be emphasized enough in our hyper-individualistic, post-modern world that "Jesus . . . did not write a book but formed a community" and “the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it" (Newbegin 1989:227). True New Testament discipleship communities are rare in contemporary culture. Church researchers of American spirituality fear that a purely personal faith “will retreat so far inside the individual that it may never come out again. And if it does not, is it really spirituality?” (Wuthnow 1994:36).

In the teachings and practices of the New Testament Church the answer is in the negative. Therefore for the church to be truly a community of reproductive disciples it must recognize both the root of the problem and its cure: "The deepest root of the contemporary
malaise in Western culture is an individualism which denies the fundamental reality of our human nature as given by God—namely that we grow into true humanity only in relationships of faithfulness and responsibility toward one another" (Newbegin 1989:231).

The church must not only promote ministry outside of its walls but must primarily be “itself the foretaste of a different social order" (Newbegin 1989:231). How this is to be done is addressed in the next section.

**Training**

If leaders in mission are to be trained in forming New Testament communities of disciples then biblical study must be given to this process. "The training of pastors, theologians and missiologists for ministry in modern Western culture ought to be based on a biblical understanding rather than historical precedents and theological distortions. Discipleship involves living out the Great Commission" (Shenk 1995:89-90).

The paradigm of separating theoretical from practical theology adopted from Schleiermacher has tended to fragment and distort the other disciplines within a seminary’s training (Kelsey and Wheeler 1995:187). At times the mental has been separated from the spiritual. While the act of knowing God on a purely rational level is expounded in a class on dogmatic theology, it is hard to find much biblical material on classes focusing on more practical spiritual matters.

This was not always the case. "Although doctrine was not identical with spiritual theology, the notion of spiritual progress without increased knowledge of God or doctrinal inquiry without spiritual fruits was inconceivable" (Allen 1997:19). For instance, Calvin's longest chapter in the Institutes, which abounds with well reasoned apologetics, is on prayer.

"In seminaries there is increasing recognition of the need for spiritual formation alongside theological education" (Gibbs 2000:231). Robert Banks concurs with Gibbs by saying that there is a growing consensus that the moral and spiritual formation which began
in the home and fostered in the broader Christian community, “must be an intentional part of seminary training, both inside and outside the classroom” (1999:25)

If the seminary’s mission is to train the future leaders of the church and the church’s mission is to form communities of reproductive disciples then would not the seminary be the very best place to not only study but to experience first-hand what it means to become a disciple in community?

In the teaching of spiritual formation within a seminary context, some have raised concerns about how our society’s highly individualistic preoccupations have influenced the communal character of spiritual practices (Banks 1999:27). The elevation of the private over against the corporate is strongly fostered by the educational process and then carried over into the vocational field. "A lone pastor all too easily becomes a lonely pastor. This is because the way pastors are trained reinforces an independent and individualistic mindset. Schaller comments that 'public education places a premium on individualism, self-reliance, and individual performance'” (Gibbs 2000:107).

Because of this lifelong pattern that most members of our culture has been nurtured on, institutions of learning as well as our churches need to seek out new forms of common life as shared by E. Dixon Junkin (1996:312).

Instead of continuing to expend such energy trying to make outworn patterns of institutional life serves us, it seems appropriate to devote more attention to the task of creating new forms of common life that may, over time, allow a new consensus of change. . . . Let us imagine thousands of communities [and seminaries] whose members in an intentional, disciplined fashion do the following six things:

1) Pray together.
2) Share their joys and struggles.
3) Study the context in which they find themselves.
4) Listen for God’s voice speaking through Scripture.
5) Seek to discern the obedience to which they are being called.
6) Engage in common ministry.

Discipleship is a wholistic, ontological concept. Just as discipleship should not be divided in the
Besides building discipleship communities in every aspect of seminary and church life in order to counteract individualism, the church needs to make sure that the discipled life is turned outward as well. In this respect "it seems clear that ministerial training as currently conceived is still far too much training for the pastoral care of the existing congregation, and far too little oriented toward the missionary calling to claim the whole of public life for Christ in his kingdom" (Newbegin 1989:231).

If a minister is to train their local congregation in mission to the world then their first and foremost responsibility will be “in the area of his or her discipleship, in that life of prayer, and daily consecration which remains hidden from the world but which is the place where the essential battles are either won or lost" (Newbegin 1989:241).

Busy, post-modern missionary pastors today need to follow the pattern of Jesus who spent time on the mountain of prayer so that He could ministry in the valley of need. If the body of believers is truly to become the priestly people of God then they need "a ministering priesthood to sustain and nourish it" (Newbegin 1989:235). If “ministerial leadership is, first and finally, discipleship" (Newbegin 1989:241), then ministerial training should follow the Lord’s pattern of making disciples in all of its cognitive, community and spiritual aspects.

Methods

Evangelism is a common term used by the church when it goes forth to make disciples.\textsuperscript{8} As has been discussed above, the Western church has been influenced for the last three hundred years by the historical reality of Christendom, the influence of marketing and the rise of individualism. All three of these have influenced evangelism as well.

In the past it was clear that when missionaries were sent to foreign fields to labor they were intentionally crossing geographical and cultural barriers to evangelize those who have local church by having separate discipleship from administrative groups, true discipleship training should not be separated in the seminary. One should not have to wait until chapel time to get a “spiritual” message.

\textsuperscript{8} Although the goal of making disciples is not implicit in the term or the activity, it is certainly the aim of such endeavors to permanently add lifelong contributing members to the church.
never heard the name of Jesus. Those who were won in such endeavors were clearly seen as “unchurched” and adding to the growth of the kingdom.

In our semi-Christian culture of the West however, it is much harder to discern if evangelism is indeed crossing boundaries in order to reach the “unchurched.” It has already been noted earlier in the studies by Bibby that much of church growth is actually church switching. Gibbs contends that most of the “unchurched” reached would be better described as 'semi-churched" (2000:177). What is counted for evangelism is merely "an ecclesiastical version of musical chairs" (2000:151). In the long term such growth is self-limiting. "Before long, churches that grow by transfer will have to do their own seeking, otherwise their growth will stall once they have drained the churches that have functioned as their networks" (Gibbs 2000:151).

Another point that needs to be made when taking about evangelism is the distinction between the very worthwhile ministry of revivalism which seeks to arouse the faithful to a deeper commitment and practice and evangelism which attempts to leave the ninety and nine and go out and seek the lost. "Evangelism in the United States has been influenced strongly by revivalism, that is, the restoration to personal faith of former church members or those who were matured within a churchgoing culture" (Gibbs 2000:193).

As early as 1957, Stephen Neill “insisted that Graham’s message and method could not be the answer to reaching people who have no personal acquaintance with the church or things Christian (Shenk 1995:66). Instead, “the vast majority of those who attend crusades are committed and practicing Christians for who it is an experience in spiritual uplift” (Rudnick 1984:202). While revivalism is extremely valuable to the life of congregations, its influence must be supplemented with more long-term discipleship programs and broader based evangelistic efforts. After all, "harvesting is done in the fields, not in barns" (Gibbs 2000:187).

Not only the “who” but the “how” of evangelism must be evaluated. At times both the church and evangelism have been influenced by the entrepreneurial model of the use of
technique to secure results. As was noted earlier, Charles Finney was the first to apply the principles of business to evangelism. The church in the west is still “tempted by technique—the ultimate manifestation of modernity” (Shenk 1999:112-113).

While new plans or techniques are greatly needed more than ever before, often they are set forth by charismatic leaders who are given credence because of their success. Their wonderful efforts need to be supplemented by other members within the body, including those who have special training in Biblical theology. "Theologians have seldom taken popular evangelists seriously, and evangelists generally do not get their cues from theologians. The church has been ill-served by this antagonistic relationship” (Pickard 1993)" (Shenk 1995:70). In the context of this study, a wholistic synthesis between evangelism and a theology of discipleship making would be most beneficial to both enterprises.

For “theology that is worked out as a community-building response to the contemporary will be lifegiving" (Shenk 1995:72). In the same way, evangelism that is worked out as a theological response to the postmodern world would be life-changing. One of the areas in which this can be practically applied is the preaching of truth.

In the past, evangelistic and soul-winning efforts have attempted to preach and teach absolute biblical truth in order to effect the spiritual conversion of the individual. Thus, such phrases as “winning people to the truth” were common slogans for campaigns and usually encapsulated the major methodological framework of the discipleship effort.9

However successful this approach has been in the past, the postmodern environment tends to downplay the authority of absolute truth while at the same time elevating the role of personal spiritual meaning. “The central role of individual belief has led to an erosion of absolute truth. In 1994 only 28% of adults and 38% of Evangelicals agreed there was any such things as absolute truth” (Barna 1994:83).

9 Of course the question of what to do with the individuals once they have been taught the truth and are baptized is rarely discussed in an adequate way.
George Barna makes a most telling commentary on how the basis of faith has shifted since the Enlightenment when he says, “Faith used to revolve around God and His ordinances and principles: the faith that arrests our attention these days is that which revolves around us” (1998:7). Given this turn inward, the traditional evangelistic method which assumes the external authority of absolute truth might have to be changed. The following quotation illustrates that people are increasingly beginning their search for truth from within.

In seeking to present the gospel to unbelievers, a strong emphasis has been placed in the past on overcoming intellectual obstacles to faith and on giving reasons to believe. The approach adopted was strongly apologetic in nature, on assumption that the main reasons keeping people from unbelief were intellectual. While such an approach is appropriate in many secular and modern settings, in a postmodern environment it may not constitute the starting part in a spiritual discussion. At present increasing numbers of people are already on a personal spiritual search for meaning and a sense of fulfillment” (Gibbs 2000:174).

This ascendancy of the subjective and search of personal meaning is a dramatic shift away from the objective standards of the scientific method and much church dogmatics. "God is now less of an external authority and more of an internal presence" (Wuthnow 1994:3). One way to picture such a shift is in the rotation between the objective and subjective poles. In the modern society an individual began with the objective which then influenced the subjective. In the postmodern world, the rotation is reversed because now the tendency is to start with the internal and work towards the external. Thus the rotation of how to discover truth is changing as illustrated by the following diagram:

TABLE 6
THE CHANGING ROTATION OF TRUTH
While those from modernity might strongly object to this reversal of the traditional starting point, Leigh Anderson makes a strong argument that the Bible supports having a historical experience such as the Exodus before it is recorded as objective truth.

The old paradigm taught that if you had the right teaching you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching . . . . It is not so much that one is right and the other is wrong; it is more a matter of the perspective one takes on God's touch and God's truth (1992:47).

The final major aspect of evangelistic methodology that has been affected by the postmodern era is the rise of individualism. The model of New Testament communities of disciples is in stark contrast to the "lone-ranger evangelistic encounters" which “can lead to people making a decision without ever getting involved in a community of believers" (Gibbs 2000:195).¹⁰ Not only was the individual left out of the community, evangelism itself was "turned into a specialized ministry largely separated from the church” (Shenk 1995:55).

To be fair, a large number of Evangelists, including the Billy Graham crusades, will not work in an area unless the local churches get involved. The International Conference for

¹⁰Not only was the individual left out of the community, evangelism itself was "turned into a specialized ministry largely separated from the church. Equally important, the evangelistic enterprise has emerged within Enlightenment culture with its public/private dichotomy, with religion consigned to the private sphere. Theologically and methodologically, it has been assumed that the main point of concentration is the individual and the sins of the flesh" (Shenk 1995:55).
Itinerant Evangelists which met in Amsterdam in 1983 came together and approved fifteen laudable affirmations which would govern their work. Affirmations twelve and thirteen which directly apply to the evangelist’s relationship with the local church read:

We are responsible to the church, and will endeavor always to conduct our ministries so as to build up the local body of believers and to serve the church at large. We are responsible to arrange for the spiritual care of those who come to faith under our ministry, to encourage them to identify with the local body of believers, and seek to provide for the instruction of believers in witnessing to the Gospel (Graham 1984:103,109).

This being said, the work of the typical evangelist is to win people to the truth and not to disciple them. That is the proper work of the local church. However as it has been seen already, most churches are not functioning as community of believers but as a group of independent individuals. While the highly task-oriented evangelist may come in for a season and inspire the church to a wonderful level of productive ministry, the short term result of adding individual souls to the congregation has usually not appreciated to a long term commitment to discipleship building. In this sense Shenk’s assessment of most evangelistic efforts is correct when the focus has been on a program “rather than the formation of a community of disciples” (Shenk 1995:62).

This molding of evangelism into a program which fostered the revival of individual piety has been long fostered by historical and societal influences.

Individualism "has its philosophical roots in the Enlightenment; but is has been lavishly reinforced by modern Christianity, including the theory and practice of evangelization. The Enlightenment church was characterized by widespread nominalism and apathy, and it was understandable that revival preaching emphasized the necessity for individual conversion and commitment. But the conjunction of Enlightenment anthropology and revival preaching that emphasized the individual—without relating this so society/church—undermined the meaning of the church. This lopsided emphasis on the individual has marked evangelical theology right up to the present" (Shenk 1995:62).

Whatever method is used to draw individuals into the church usually remains their way of thinking about the church. People who come into the church through programming
tend to be program oriented. Community building activities will draw community oriented people. Sally Margenthaler states the premise well by saying that whatever is the introductory orientation in a church, becomes the “point of reference” (1995:44).

It would seem that if the church is to be composed of discipleship communities, then the church should form those discipleship communities prior to any method that might be used to bring new believers in. Only in this way can evangelistic methods “have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community" (Newbegin 1989:227) which is involved in mission.

This method of forming communities of ministry would seem to better reflect the New Testament model as well:

The centrality of the household has a further implication for the way we conceive of the Pauline mission: it shows our modern, individualistic conceptions of evangelism and conversion to be quite inappropriate . . . . Social solidarity might be more important in persuading some members to be baptized than would understanding or convictions about specific beliefs (Meeks 1983:77).

A strongly communal and mission-oriented church not only provides the most productive environment for the evangelistic effort, but also should generate a goodly number of interests based on their own social missional network of people. After all, "the great majority of people who affiliate with a church in the United States do so as a result of a personal relationship" (Shenk 1995:66). The best advertisement for a campaign is not a cold handbill but a warm heart. In the final analysis, the efforts of any evangelist will be helped or hindered by the local discipleship factor that is resident in the local church. What to look for and how to measure this factor is addressed in the last section.

Measuring

A very common way to measure church vitality in the past has been to count “nickels and noses.” While these figures might be helpful for administrative and general purposes,
those facts alone hardly can measure the true quality of Christian discipleship. This principle of measuring quality along with quantity is brought out clearly in the New Testament which qualifies the number of the twelve apostles with this telling comment about the discipleship condition of one of them: “and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor” (Luke 6:16).

Christian Smith comments that most of the debates on the topic of religious strength in the “sociology of religion literature revolve around differences in a single dimension of religious vitality: church attendance and membership" (1998:20)\(^\text{11}\). He himself comments that merely counting the people sitting in the pews could be very misleading.

"Hypothetically, a church's pews could be completely filled with regular attenders who are exceptionally uncommitted, uninformed, and apathetic religiously—who perhaps want nothing more than a place to meet useful business contacts and the status they think is associated with being an upstanding, church-going citizen in the community" (1998:20).

Following up that hypothetical comment with broad research Smith reports that a “number of mainline and liberal Protestants tended to speak more of church attendance as a weekly routine than as the center of their social lives or as vital to their spiritual lives" (1998:58). So much for the mere counting of noses as a measure of whole-hearted and whole-life discipleship.

Gibbs agrees with Bibby’s earlier comment on “the circulation of the saints” that an “increased attendance at worship services and other church-related activities creates a premature sense of achievement. We always have to ask who the new people are and where are they coming from" (Gibbs 2000:41). Transfer growth from other churches is not significant unless it can be demonstrated that these new members are not merely passively absorbing a high-quality program but are actively involved in high-quality discipleship.

Furthermore, Bibby observes that growth for some churches in the past has been almost entirely self-serving. In this type of evangelism and discipleship, people’s names

\(^\text{11}\) Smith here cites fifteen studies by such researchers as Finke, Stark, Inaccone. Blau, Kelly, Bibby and Brinkerhoff.
were "wanted on the membership list; their money was wanted for the church budget; their
time was wanted for the church programs and the name of the game was strengthening the

Another way to misunderstand figures according to Bibby is in the area of just who is
attending the evangelistic meetings. Here the temptation has often been to not “bother to
count very carefully” (1997:263).

On the surface, such evangelistic programs do work. Many family members,
including relatives, are responding to the evangelistic appeals and are being
converted. Until such time as someone does some counting . . . it is easy to
believe that evangelistic programs are being successful. . . . Holding
evangelistic services, even when the audience is predominantly Christian
gives a church the appearance of ’preaching the gospel to the lost,’ allowing a
member to feel that he/she belongs to an evangelistic church (1997:264).

As such, the members of the church "sit back in comfortable pews and take in their
favourite preachers, prodigals, and—of course—singers" (1997:264). As has already been
discussed, while the effort to revive church members with inspiring preaching, testimony and
song is extremely valuable, it should not be labeled as mission or evangelism.

Another figure often used to judge the success of campaigns is the number of
baptisms. Everyone who is baptized is usually lumped into one category, despite the clear
distinction which could be made between those who grew up in the church (biological
growth); were rebaptized; were already attending church or the truly unchurched.

Even when the initial baptismal figures are compiled, the long-term discipleship or
lack thereof needs to be carefully studied. George Barna has found that the discipling of new
converts is in serious jeopardy. “Studies we have conducted over the past year indicate that a
majority of the people who made a first-time ‘decision’ for Christ were no longer connected
to a Christian church within just eight weeks of having made such a decision” (1998:2).

Orlando Costas borrows a figure from the natural world of oncology when commenting on how growth can actually be harmful to the organism.
To say that an organism is growing means nothing unless one explains how and in what sense it is growing. . . . Not all growth is authentic or convenient. Growth can be superficial and shallow. Indeed it can be detrimental for an organism. There is such a thing as deformed growth which contributes to the death of an organism (1983:96-97).

Jesus told His disciples that they would be known by their fruits (Mt. 7:16). "Fruitfulness signifies both character replication and numerical reproduction; in other words, growth in quality and quantity" (Gibbs 2000:73). With this broader view in mind then, what are some objective and subjective elements which should be measured when evaluating discipleship within a local congregation?

Christian Smith has given a good list of studies which have attempted to go beyond mere attendance figures and measure religious strength. In his study of American Evangelicalism, Smith gives six aspects of religious strengths in which to measure the “ordinary evangelicals” (1998:21-22). They are:

1) faithfully adhere to essential Christian beliefs.
2) consider their faith a highly salient aspect of their lives.
3) reflect great confidence and assurance in their religious beliefs.
4) participate regularly in a variety of church activities and programs.
5) are committed in both belief and action to accomplishing the mission of the church
6) sustain high rates of membership retention by maintaining member's association with the tradition over long periods of time, effectively socializing new members into that tradition and winning new converts to that tradition.

Smith’s basically focuses on beliefs, participation and mission as three main indicators of religious strength. Gibbs further focuses the general heading of religious strength by asking two questions which stress the disciple making activity of the church.

"What percentage of a growing congregation is finding support and being held accountable in face-to-face relationships that are so essential to

12 Some of the names of the seven studies cited are from Kanter, Marxwell, Wuthnow, Glock and Stark.
discipleship? What percentage is moving from a passive, consumer-oriented mentality to one of sacrificial, and fruitful Christian service?” (2000:42).

Along with agreeing with Smith that mission is a central theme of religious strength, Gibbs intensifies Smith’s regular participation by making it more intentional, supportive and accountable. It has been a major theme of this paper that the loss of mission has been accompanied by a loss of community. It would seem highly apparent that a recovery both is absolutely essential to both the generation and measurement of discipleship.

Bibby approaches the question of religious strength from the opposite direction. Instead of asking the church if it is discipling its members, we should be asking the community what influence the mission of the church is having in its midst.

What's happening in the churches? is the question that's foremost on many minds. 'What's happening in the culture because of what is happening in the churches?’ is a question that is largely overlooked.

What's worth counting? It depends on what business religious groups are in. If they are in the church building business, it makes sense to count heads and dollars. If they are in the faith-sharing business, it makes sense to count heads and dollars in order to get a sense of organizational health, as well as what kind of faith-sharing might be going on within the local outlet or the national corporation.

When these sorts of statistics are added to the annual head counts of average attendance, baptisms, and members in and out, it will be possible for the skeptical outsider to begin to believe that religious groups are in the faith-sharing business (Bibby 1997:287).

Orlando Costas also agrees with a more wholistic measurement of discipleship by grounding it in “three theologically identifiable qualities of growth” which emanate from the church’s Trinitarian nature. These three qualities are: 1) Spirituality (the fellowship of the Spirit), 2) Incarnational (the body of Christ) and 3) Faithfulness as God’s covenant people (1983-101-102). He further subdivides these three theological areas into the four dimensions of numerical, organic,\(^\text{13}\) conceptual and missional growth (1983-102-103). These aspects might be arranged in the following table with slightly different headings.

\(^{\text{13}}\) See also Christian Schawarz (1996).
TABLE 7
ORGANIC DIMENSIONS OF CHURCH GROWTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Numerical</th>
<th>Conceptual</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>Missional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Spirit—Abiding</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Son—Abounding</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Father—Faithfulness</td>
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Although there is a correspondence between the conceptual, organic and missional categories of Costas and the beliefs, participation and mission of Smith, Costas has more thoroughly grounded and linked the concepts theologically. William Dryness and James Davison Hunter have also linked the conceptual with the organic aspects of church life. Hunter worries that the rationalization of cultural has drawn the vitality out of three activities which are essential for spiritual growth. These three spiritual disciplines are Bible reading, prayer and public testimony (1983:73-101). In the matrix drawn above, both the abiding (Bible study and prayer) and abounding-type (testimony) of spiritual disciplines would have an important place in the implementation and measurement of discipleship.

Furthermore, Dryness found in his sampling that “there does not seem to be much concern for any objective foundation underlying their vital experiences with Christ” (1992:145). Again, the table allows for the dynamic linking between the subjective–oriented practices of private devotion and the conceptual or objective authority of the church’s teaching.

In the first chapter it was discussed how the Christian teaching to love one another generated a far more meaningful ministry than the self-absorbed rites of paganism. Just as the social factor in conversion has been forgotten in the ocean of individualism so has the formative influence of doctrine been lost in the sea of pluralism:

In contrast with times past, historians today are more than willing to discuss how social factors shaped religious doctrines. Unfortunately, at the same time they have become somewhat reluctant to discuss how doctrines may have
shaped social factors. This shows up with particular frequency in the form of allergic reactions to arguments that attribute the rise of Christianity to superior theology (Stark 1991:209).

In today’s highly individualistic, world-cultured and pluralistic society it is almost heretical “to suggest that any religious doctrines are ‘better’ than any other” (Stark 1991:209). However, the record of the New Testament apparently shows that “Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating and effective social relations and organizations” (Stark 1991:211). In other words, the early church demonstrated the importance of linking the conceptual with the communal and missional aspects of church life.

Although the spiritual strength of a new believer cannot be measured using a similar scale with a more mature believer, the call to be a reproductive disciple cannot “be postponed until one has achieved a high level of maturity as a follower of Christ but is part of the ongoing process of discipleship” (Gibbs 2000:56). Therefore, the temporal aspect needs to be factored into any measurement of discipleship.

Summary

Postmodernism can be seen either as a reaction against or extension of Modernity. Its growing influence in the society and church is pervasive, marked by an escalating change of focus and ideas. The traditional, modern and postmodern aspects of society our senses and the church were compared. The net effect has increasingly pushed the church back to the same peripheral position in society it once stood in the New Testament.

The findings of Christian Smith in his study of American Evangelicalism showed that although this segment of religious life is thriving within a pluralistic environment, its individualistic underpinnings has dampened its influence. In addition, church groups have borrowed from the mass marketing and consumer orientation in order to reach society without a critically evaluating how these modern techniques correspond to the Biblical nature of the church.
It was posited that a return to the periphery of society should generate a renewed discussion concerning the nature of the church in light of history. It was discovered that the central place that mission held in the New Testament fellowship was eclipsed by the nominal conversion of Europe during the period of Christendom. The modern missionary movement paralleled the geographical expansion of the last three hundred years and focused on the going to win the heathen which were outside the civilized territory of Europe.

The thoroughgoing secularization and individualism of the postmodern age has given the church a renewed challenge to disciple the increasing numbers of people within the very shadow of its sanctuaries. With this challenge in mind, the building of community, the training of pastors, the methods of evangelism and the measuring of disciple making efforts were discussed.
CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction the critical task of the church to make disciples at the very start of the twenty-first century was set forth as a challenge to construct a solid biblical, theological and historical foundation which had its roots firmly planted in the New Testament, its branches swaying in the last breezes of the Enlightenment and its topmost growth reaching out to the still uncertain air of postmodernism. In this discussion it has been sought to avoid the oft-told tale of placing new patches of discipleship programming on the old wineskins of a truncated ecclesiology. What follows is a summation of the findings.

Summary

In the first chapter the social context, beliefs and practices of New Testament Christianity were contrasted with our own. We found that the “church” (ekklesia) was comprised primarily of small groups scattered in cities which were both intimate and actively engaged with the larger urban society. These cities were relatively small, filthy and tightly congested, linked by a network of roads which circulated a diversity of people and ideas.

The tight confines of the city became the breeding ground for an infectious type of new community which was based on a set of relationships influenced by the teachings of Jesus. Having entered and been transformed in community, they are sent forth by the community to transform those outside of the community. The conceptual, communal and missional were linked together. They defined the nature of the church.

This paradigm stands in stark contrast to the methods of evangelism today where personal conversion and indoctrination are often done in isolation from a worshipping community. One of the greatest achievements of modernity was the creation of the
autonomous individual, which prided itself in developing beliefs and practices independent from communities which were often rightly judged as historically oppressive. Just as the social factor in conversion has been forgotten in the ocean of individualism so has the formative influence of doctrine been lost in the sea of pluralism. Both the individual and beliefs became the one among the many.

In Canada and elsewhere, individuals are increasingly looking for spiritual answers outside the walls of the church. Even when Christians meet together in small groups they are infected with a fair degree of individualism. The spiritual disciplines, although practiced, have at times been superficial in nature.

The findings of Christian Smith in his study of American Evangelicalism showed that although this segment of religious life is thriving within a pluralistic environment, its individualistic underpinnings has dampened its influence. In addition, church groups have borrowed from the mass marketing and consumer orientation in order to reach society without a critically evaluating how these modern techniques correspond to the Biblical nature of the church.

Postmodernism can be seen either as a reaction against or extension of Modernity. Its growing influence in the society and church is pervasive, marked by an escalating change of focus and ideas. The net has increasingly pushed the church back to the same peripheral position in society it once stood in the New Testament which should generate a renewed discussion concerning the nature of the church in light of history.

The thoroughgoing secularization and individualism of the postmodern age has given the church a renewed challenge to make disciples. The building of community, the training of pastors, the methods of evangelism and the measuring of disciple making efforts were discussed in light of the biblical teaching of the past and the social realities of the present. An organic model, which encompassed more than mere attendance figures, was designed.
Conclusions

The tight confines of the city in Roman times became the breeding ground for an infectious type of new community which was not based on a “book nor a rite, neither a code nor a cult, but a set of relationships” (Banks 1998:108). This focus on community and relationship as the foundation for the New Testament understanding of church was, and still is revolutionary:

Paul’s approach is revolutionary in the ancient world. In view of subsequent developments—in which Catholicism increasingly followed the path of the cults in making a rite the center of its activities, and Protestantism followed the path of the synagogue in placing a book at the center of its services—it would be true to say that in most respects it remains no less revolutionary today (Banks 1998:108).

This radically new community did not arise in a vacuum but deepened and broadened the traditional relationships of the Greco-Roman world. The life and teachings of Jesus were poured into His disciples so that they might be poured out into the world. This eclectic group of believers, who were bonded together by a common life, a divine love and an uncommon mission, not only hypothesized but showed what the essential nature and ministry of the church should be.

At one point in the paper we were in imagination carried back to what it must have been like to attend a first century church held in a home. One wonders what a first century Christian would think and feel if they should attend a church today? Perhaps the one word which would arise from such an encounter is “superficial.” Superficial in belief, superficial in community, superficial in mission.

And perhaps if they were given an opportunity to address the believers of today, there could be not better texts than those found in Revelation two and three which talk about returning to the first love and not longer being content with unsound doctrine, lukewarm relationships or a narrowly focused mission. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:22).
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Extra individualism

"To help mitigate the ill-effects of individualism, however, the small-group movement must become more aware of the ways in which it also promotes individualism. Just because people are joining support groups, we should not conclude that they have made the needs of others a priority in their lives. They may be seeking community but only finding themselves" (Wuthnow 1994:215).

"What is at issue is not simply whether self-contained individuals might withdraw from the public sphere to pursue purely private ends, but whether such individuals are capable of sustaining either a public or private life. If this is the danger, perhaps only the civic and biblical forms of individualism—forms that see the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition—are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life" (Bellah 1996:143).

"The American pattern of privatizing religion while at the same time allowing it some public functions has proven highly compatible with the religious pluralism that has characterized America from the colonial period and grown more and more pronounced" (Bellah 1996:225).

"Today's individualism has seemingly neutralized many basic interpersonal values that presumably were more widely endorsed earlier in this century" (Bibby 1997:93).

"The underlying problem of the mainline churches cannot be solved by new programs of church development alone. That problem is the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life" (Johnson 1993:18).

"Yet as simple and obvious as the suggestion seems, the sad truth is that relatively few of us are presently participating in a community characterized by such intention and discipline" (Junkin 1995:313).

Good diagram between the traditional/renewalist/mission model (Roxburgh 1995:329).

"The really tough question is not contact. It's purpose" (Bibby 1997:291).

"People who are involved intensely in groups designated to foster discipleship talk a lot about accountability" (Wuthnow 1994:275).

"small groups may be fostering an intuitive spirituality rather than one grounded in biblical traditions" (Wuthnow 1994:277).
"Statistical analysis also reveals that studying the Bible is the single activity that discriminates best between those whose faith has been influenced by their group and those whose faith has not been influenced" (Wuthnow 1994:278).

"The reason group study worked better than individual study for many people was that it disciplined their efforts" (Wuthnow 1994:279).

"But the reinforcement that comes from considering ideas as a group gives them added significance" (Wuthnow 1994:280).

Being alone together

Elizabeth O'Conner: "If engagement with ourselves does not push back horizons so that we see neighbors we did not see before, then we need to examine the appointment kept with self" (Wuthnow 1994:317).

Table: Church Involvement as a result of small groups: (Wuthnow 1994:321).

"increased involvement in church programs and increased giving are restricted largely to small-group members who are already actively involved in their churches" (Wuthnow 1994:331).

"The reluctance to make commitments is reflected in all relationships, not simply church fellowship" (Gibbs 2000:152).

"The statistical indicators of faith are still high, but its social influence is down" (Gibbs 2000:43).

"Every organism grows, but not all growth is healthy" (Costas 1983:98).

Church: "A committed company of believers" (Costas 1983:100).

"Evangelicals have a good book. But often it does not get out of the warehouse" (Bibby 1997:265). "Such self-absorption might make for solid congregations... unfortunately, it's very easy for the warehouse to become a clubhouse" (Bibby 1997:268) with table.

"What assurance do we have that secularized modes of evangelization and not sources of alienation rather than means to personal and social reconciliation" (Shenk 1995:63).