

# MINISTRY IN THE NEW GLOBAL CULTURE OF MAJOR CITY-CENTERS

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## I. WORLD CITY-CENTERS ARE GROWING IN POWER AND CONNECTEDNESS

### A. Globalization is making major world cities more powerful than ever. Why?

- 1) The mobility of capital means national governments are now virtually powerless to control the flow of money in and out of their own economies, thus greatly decreasing their influence in general. The cities are the seats of multi-national corporations and international economic, social, technological networks. 2) The technology/ communication revolution means that national governments are powerless also to control what their people watch or learn. As a result, it is the culture/values set of world-class cities that is now being transmitted around the globe to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. NY and LA are now far more influential in forming the culture of, say, teenagers in rural Indiana or rural Mexico than are the national or local governments or civic institutions. Sum: This is the first overall major erosion of nation-state power in 800 years.
- N.Pierce: *"Great metropolitan regions...not nation-states--are starting to emerge as the world's most influential players."* Cities are growing in the 'Third World' at an enormous rate and are regenerating in the U.S. and Europe. In the U.S. even smaller cities have seen a renaissance of their downtown cores, as professionals, immigrants, international business leaders, empty-nest baby-boomers, artists, and the 'young and hip' move back in. The coming world 'order' will be a global, multi-cultural, urban order.

### B. Globalization is making world-cities even more connected and thus alike.

- Globalization means, secondly, that the largest cities in each country are becoming more alike and connected to one another than they are to the rest of their own countries. This is particularly true of the world *city-centers*.
  - *What are 'city-centers'?* The center city, unlike the 'inner city' (where the poor live) or where the working-class live, is where there is a confluence of a) residences for professionals, b) major work and job centers, and c) major cultural institutions--all in close proximity.
  - *Who lives in the 'city-centers'?* a) Young single corporate professionals and b) young creative professionals (the hip and artistic)--both trying to 'make it'. c) Corporate leaders who 'make it' into wealth and d) creative leaders (of the arts and the academy)--who create alliances to run the major cultural institutions of society. e) New Immigrant families (who work and live near the city-centers—e.g. 'Chinatowns') and their f) 2nd-generation children seeking professional success. g) Large numbers of students and academics, and h) the gay community.
- The cultures of center-cities in different hemispheres are surprisingly similar. There are many daily connections and their residents travel and move back and forth between them. So ministry leaders from other cities in the world come to Redeemer in NYC and say: "We admire many U.S. churches but they are in places that are unlike our own country and culture. But NYC is very much like the largest cities in our own country--so we think much that 'works' there will probably work here."

## II. GLOBAL CITY-CENTER CULTURE IS COMPLEX.

So globalized city-centers are the strategic 'leading edge' of world culture. So what are they like? Would we say that young city-center dwellers are 'post-moderns'? That analysis is too simplistic.

### A. The limitations of the modern vs. post-modern categories of analysis.

- There is almost a consensus among suburban Anglo evangelicals that Baby boomers are more 'modern' but the younger generations are 'post-modern', and so ministry will need to change radically to reach the 'emerging' culture. Some of the polarities:
  - Moderns are rational/cognitive; post-moderns are more experiential and intuitive
  - Moderns are secular, anti-spiritual; post-moderns are more open to the spiritual, mystical
  - Moderns are more 'hard' liberal or 'hard' conservative; post-moderns are less ideological
  - Moderns are individualistic; post-moderns are more oriented to community and friendship
- These generalizations are largely true among Anglos, who went through a period in which our culture almost worshipped science and rationality and the absolute freedom of the individual over family and community. Now among some Anglos, there is a strong reaction against 'modernity'. There is a strong reaction to the very idea of 'objective truth' so the emphasis is on experience rather than information, narrative rather than propositions, dialogue rather than proclamation, process rather than settled positions. Anglo evangelicals seeking to create an 'emerging church' have called for 'non-foundationalist' theology that incorporates post-modern insights.
- But African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians didn't get such a strong dose of the Enlightenment even here in the US, and the people of Africa, Latin America, and Asia certainly did not either. The post-modern allergy to

setting boundaries, to fixed doctrine, to persuasion-evangelism, to objective truth does not resonate very well with them. They are not as much in reaction to 'modernity' since they never were as rationalistic and individualistic as US-Europeans had become.

- Additionally, post-modernism in academic circles is now seen as a spent force. For example:
  - The European thinkers who developed 'deconstruction' in the 70s and 80s are seen as passé.
  - At the Univ-Chicago in 1997 a major conference was held called 'After Post-modernism'. It posed the question: *If we absorb postmodernism...but do not want to stop in arbitrariness, relativism, or aphoria, what comes after postmodernism?*
  - Terry Eagleton recently wrote *After Theory* (2004) saying that we have to realize again that there are moral absolutes. Emily Eakin wrote an article for the *New York Times* "The Latest Theory is that Theory Doesn't Matter" (April 19, 2003) covering a high level gathering in U.S. academia reported the consensus that post-modern theory was dead, largely because it didn't give anyone the basis for calling oppression and injustice *wrong*.
  - As a result there are many efforts (probably too inchoate to be called a 'movement' as yet) seeking to get beyond the modern idolization of individual consciousness (in which the individual defines truth for him or her-self) *and* the post-modern idolization of community (in which the community defines the grammar of truth and there is no way to know if it has any correspondence to reality.) N.T. Wright refers to 'naïve realism' of pre-modern times, the 'positivist realism' of modernism, the 'anti-realism' of post-modernity, and the 'critical realism' which is now emerging. This is a view that we can know truth, though only partially and after a great deal of humble critical reflection. (*The New Testament and the People of God*, p.32ff.)
  - Paul Vitz has termed this new way "Trans-modern" ("The Future of the University: From Post-modern to Transmodern" in *Rethinking the Future of the University* ed. D.L.Jeffrey.) There is music, art, literature, and architecture trying to move 'beyond' both modern rationalism and the post-modern allergy to reason and love of fragmentation. (See J.Parker "A Requiem for Postmodernism--Whither Now?" in *Reclaiming the Center* Crossway, 2004.)
- The cultural reality in city-centers is that *all* the 'world-views'—traditional, modern, post-modern, and post-post-modern exist in significant strength. We should not imagine that 'post-modernism' is a juggernaut that will take over. Global city-centers are complex 'salad' bowls' of them all. Effective ministry must recognize that and not simplistically aim to only reach 'post-moderns' which will only be a slice of city-centers.
  - The traditional world-view will be especially present with first-generation immigrants who have made it professionally in the city-center and come to city-center churches.
  - The modern world-view will be especially present with Anglos, with middle aged people, and with those working more in business and science.
  - The post-modern world-view will be especially present with younger Anglos, and those in the arts (80% of which are Anglo.)
  - The post-post-modern world-view is seen in younger non-Anglos and in today's teenagers.

## B. Comparing three city-center 'world-views' and a fourth.

**1. TRADITIONALIST-** People from US South and Midwest, rural/small towns. Blue-collar people in general, non-Anglo 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants from non-western countries, people 70 or older.

- **Identity-** *Duty accepted.* Your social obligations define you. Your conscience is the 'real you' more than feelings or reason. You have a duty to your people and family, and you find meaning and significance in fulfilling that. There is little talk of 'finding yourself' but rather of fulfilling your role in the tribe/people. Example: homosexuality is unmentionable.
- **Meaning of life-** To be good.
- **Major cultural 'felt need'-** How can I get the strength to be a good person? How can I overcome the feelings of guilt over ways I have failed? Much more concern for traditional values.
- **Value-** Give me the *right* thing to do--and I will do it.
- **Relationships-** The most important relationships are people you are born into relationship with--family, clan, long-time neighbors. The primary relationship is a family one. You love them by being totally loyal or faithful to them. "Storge"-based love.
- **Persuasion-** Concrete thinkers. Show me how this produces good character, I'll believe it.
- **Idols-** 1) Authority. Prone to blind duty. 2) Racism. Prone to make an idol out of your people or 'blood' (fascism.) 3) Moralism. A very overt belief you save yourself by being good.
- **Ministry contextualization** (cf. III.A and C below)-
  - 1) Contextualizing the gospel to traditional people (see 'cultural felt need')--a) You know you should be good, but you aren't (sin as falling short of the glory of God) b) only in Jesus can you be both forgiven and made righteous (grace as propitiation of wrath.)
  - 2) Dangers of over-contextualization to traditional people: a) The gospel becomes *only* a way to get your individual personal sins/failings covered so you can go to heaven. b) Preaching becomes exclusively doctrinal and legalistic. c) Leadership becomes authoritarian. Pastors wield enormous personal power d)

Tone becomes harsh and condemning toward outsiders. e) Often too heavily rooted in the past. Some former historical Christian era is seen as 'golden'.

- 3) Key way to challenge traditional people- the gospel of *grace*. Religion is as much a form of self-salvation as immorality and irreligion. Sin is self-salvation, not just breaking the rules. Explain 'elder-brother lostness' not only 'younger brother lostness' from Luke 15. If anything, religion is a greater barrier to real conversion and life-change than is irreligion.

**2. MODERN-** People from U.S. Northeast and West coast, suburbs and exurbs. College educated over 45, those in corporate rather than the creative professions, Anglo. 'Boomers' and 'Bobos'.

- **Identity-** *Desire discovered*. Your deepest passions and desires define you. Your feelings are more the real 'you' than your duties or even your thinking. You have a duty to discover your deepest feelings and dreams and you find meaning and significance in fulfilling that. The rights, freedom, and fulfillment of the individual are far more important than the needs of a group or family or community. Example: homosexuality is 'discovered'. If I am gay, I must fulfill that.
- **Meaning of life-** To be free (and therefore happy.)
- **Major 'felt need'** - How can I be free? How can I be set free to find my truest self and pursue my greatest passions? Much more concern for individual human rights and freedom.
- **Value-** Give me what I need to fulfill my personal goals and vision.
- **Relationships-** The most important relationships are those with people who help you get to your personal goals, who give you good feelings and emotions. The primary relationship is a sexual one. You love them by freeing them to be themselves. "Eros"-based love.
- **Persuasion-** Rational thinkers. If you can prove it to me, give me enough reasons, I'll believe it. They are not at all open to the idea of the supernatural or miracles, and they tend to see religion of any kind to be primitive and a barrier to scientific and social progress.
- **Idols-** 1) Feelings. If I feel it I must not go against it. I can't help them. 2) Individualism. I decide what is right or wrong for me. 3) Science and reason. By them we can control the environment and make a world that fulfills my desires. 4) Implicit moralism that I save myself by achieving.
- **Ministry contextualization** (cf. III.A and C below)-
  - 1) Contextualizing the gospel for moderns (see 'cultural felt need') a) you know you should be free but you aren't (sin as building your identity on idols rather than God) b) only in Jesus will you have a Lord that does not enslave and who became a ransom to buy you out of slavery (grace as liberation from bondage-personal 'powers'.)
  - 2) Dangers of over-contextualization to moderns: a) The gospel becomes *only* a way to get personal fulfillment here and now, get your needs met, solve your personal problems. b) Preaching becomes exclusively practical 'how-to' sermons on living. c) Leadership adopts a business-model. Pastors are more CEOs than shepherds. d) Individualistic (with little emphasis on working for the common good) and moralistic (blessing happens through your efforts to 'apply Biblical principles') e) Almost no rootedness in the past at all. Distinctives of historic tradition (Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox, Wesleyan, etc) are played way down or dropped altogether.
  - 3) Key way to challenge moderns- the gospel of the *kingdom*. Show how secular people are just as 'religious' (through idolatry) and ultimately just as enslaved and self-saving as the moralistic religious people you despise. Call to forsake old masters/lords and come into a new administration/ kingdom based on service. Show how it is belief in the gospel (not just trying harder) that is the solution to every problem.

**3. POST-MODERN** – People from U.S. Northeast and West, especially urban areas. College-educated 25-45 mainly Anglo. Sometimes called 'cultural creatives' (Paul H. Ray) or 'creative class' (R. Florida)

- **Identity-** *Created and unstable*. There is no 'true' identity to be either accepted or discovered. There is no core 'essence' to which to be true--either moral or psychological. (See Kenneth Gergen.) One's identity is pieced together and is constantly changing. There is little or no talk of 'finding yourself' but rather 'creating' yourself. Example: homosexuality is 'constructed', chosen.
- **Meaning of life-** You have to find your own way on that. There is no over-arching purpose. Much less emphasis on 'vision', much less confidence that we know what is best for the world or others or ourselves. We 'see through' so many 'visions' for the world as having been just power plays.
- **Major cultural 'felt need'**- How can such totally different/diverse people live together in peace? How can community be built in a deeply pluralistic world? Much more concern for social justice.
- **Value-** Give me something that *moves* me (because so little does!)
- **Relationships-** The most important relationships are the people you are *committed* to. (Reaction vs. the discardable selfish relationships of modernists.) The primary relationship is *friendship*. You love them by not judging them. 'Philos'-based love. In general, a deep hunger for community.
- **Persuasion-** Pragmatists. Show me that this *works*--and builds community, and I'll believe it. They are not as rational or as linear in their thinking and are much more open to story and mystery. They are not as skeptical of the supernatural or of spirituality, but they see the church as a key wielder historically of oppressive power.
- **Idols-** 1) Inclusion. An unwillingness to ever confront or take a stand for truth. No one can ever be made to feel like an outsider. 2) Doubt/cynicism. An extremely deep belief (!) that virtually everyone is out to exploit

you. An unwillingness to commit to any idea or truth or cause--just friends. 3) Group identity. My community defines reality—no one from outside can evaluate or judge it. 4) Implicit moralism. Cynicism is ultimately pride that *you* are the only one not 'phony.'

- **Ministry contextualization** (cf. III.A and C below)-
  - 1) Contextualizing the gospel for post-moderns (see cultural 'felt need')- a) you know you should love and embrace 'the Other' who is deeply different from you but you can't help but feel superior (sin as exclusion) b) Christianity is the only faith which has at its heart a man dying for his enemies, giving up power, becoming a servant, forgiving them rather than destroying them (grace as the great reversal of value.)
  - 2) Dangers of over-contextualization to post-modern: a) The gospel becomes *only* a way to join a kingdom- movement bringing peace and justice to the world. Thus a new form of moralism ('commit to peace and justice and you'll be saved') b) Preaching becomes only story-telling rather than exposition of truth c) The leadership model can become so relational that churches must stay extremely small and disorganized. d) While there is a hunger for ancient tradition, there's a danger of not inhabiting any particular historic tradition (Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox, Wesleyan, etc) and instead just take the trappings of tradition (Celtic crosses, discussions of *lectio divina*, candles, etc) to create a superficial pastiche. e) Non-judgementalism is an idol (we can't offend anyone) and thus a new exclusivism.
  - 3) Key way to challenge post-moderns- the gospel of the *cross*. The cross is *not* pragmatic--it doesn't 'work' for you! Belief in Christ means admitting there *is* truth--but the only kind of truth that won't oppress you. When give up power to the one who gave up power for you--it is the only non-exploitative relationship. Even living for your own ego will exploit you.

#### 4. TRANS-MODERN - Non-Anglo children of immigrants; Age under 25.

- I am not at all sure that the post-post-modern world-view will be called this! A Google search shows that many people are using this as a synonym for post-modern. But *some* post-po-mo is surely coming for the reasons I mentioned above. a) In the academy po-mo is seen as basically an unstable compound and more a negative—a recognition of the limitations of modernity—than a positive. b) Non-Anglos and those outside Europe and North America didn't go through the 'Enlightenment,' used the modern world more critically, and so won't ever become as allergic to reason and the idea of objective truth as 'post-moderns' are. c) We can already see some signs among non-Anglo youth and even Anglo youth that the extreme cynicism and fear of authority and relativism of post-modern culture is on the wane. (See Christian Smith's new book *Soul Searching* on the religious patterns of U.S. teenagers. He calls it 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.') Teens are less likely to have sex, abortions, out-of-wedlock births than people now in their 20s.
- I think the 'trans-modern' (or whatever it will be) will reject both a) the skepticism of modernity (that does not believe anything unless it is empirically proven) and b) the subjectivism of post-modernity (that does not believe there is any way to know that one belief is truer than any other belief.) Will this be a neo-traditionalism? Will it be a compromise between modern and post-modern? Only time will tell if these are even the right questions.

### III. HOW TO REACH AND MINISTER IN GLOBAL CITY-CENTERS.

#### A. Characteristics of global city-center culture

So can we speak of the 'marks' of city-center culture if there is not only such diversity of ethnicities but even diversities of world-view? Yes. City-center culture is a 'salad bowl' with the two dominant ingredients—modern and post-modern world-view—interacting and blending in different ways.

1. The City-center is a ***culture of expertise***. People who live in city centers are usually highly skilled and highly educated. Ministry implications: a) Artistic quality is very important. Amateurish art and music will not go over well, especially with the high percentage of center-city residents who are themselves artists. And the post-modern 'turn' puts more emphasis on the visual, on graphics, on embodiment. b) Communication needs to be very high in quality and be highly intelligent. There is a surprising amount of anti-intellectualism within the evangelical world. People have noticed for years that campus fellowships at Ivy League schools are very anti-intellectual and pietistic. In general, however, such A-I-P will not reach the people who tend to 'make it' and stay put in city-centers.

2. City-center people are ***living in their career***. Many people work in order to come home and have a life. But city-center people essentially inhabit their careers. It is also so expensive to live in city-centers that most have to work hard to make enough money to stay there. Ministry implications: You can't just disciple people on how to be Christians in their private lives (e.g. prayer, witnessing, Bible study.) Center-city people don't have much in the way of a 'private life.' If you are in finance or art or acting or medicine your vocation dominates your life and your time. Discipleship must include how to be distinctively Christian within your job, including: a) how to handle the peculiar temptations and ethical quandaries, b) how to produce work in one's field from a distinctly Christian world-view, c) how to help other Christians in your field also do their work excellently and influence the culture.

3. City-center people are **very sexually active** and believe their sexuality is completely private—their business alone. Ministry implications: There must be a lack of prudishness about sex yet great and strong teaching/emphasis on the Christian understanding of sex designed for life-time commitment and community-building, not personal gratification. The area of sex and gender is (currently) politically explosive and it is extremely important for teaching in this area to be smart, sensitive, irenic, and nuanced ways, carefully co-opting existing cultural narratives (about freedom, identity, and community) yet upholding the Biblical view of things. Even strong Christians in city-centers will be under great temptation to be sexually active in various ways that can undermine or destroy their spiritual effectiveness.

4. City-center people have **consumer identities**. Traditional culture had 'thick' communities in which you got identity through one's role in the family and society. Modern and post-modern culture thins out community (through mobility), and 'frees' individuals to create their own identity and achieve their own significance. This leaves us vulnerable to consumerism--we get a sense of both status and distinctiveness by things we purchase. Consumer-identities turn everything (including church) into a commodity that meets your needs. Implications: This and #2 above pose an enormous challenge to the church. Center-city people will spend most of their time achieving identity in work and accruing wealth and 'consuming' church programs that help them along the way, instead of identifying with the church community and changing lives of others through sharing their wealth. C-C churches need great and strong teaching/emphasis on the importance of commitment to community.

5. City-center people are the most **rootless** people (geographically, socially, historically) in the world. (See Pico Iyer's "Nowhereians.") Modern capitalism uproots people from geography in the quest for work and money. The modern world-view has disdained the past and tended to make people also feel historically rootless. Ministry implications: a) Historic roots: Both the traditional and post-modern are extremely interested in the historic roots of the church. Liturgical renewal and eclectic music/art (opera and Mozart and jazz and gospel) is better than the 'contemporary worship' for providing those roots. b) Geographic roots: The C-C church recognizes the critical importance of 1) high quality and accessible small groups and 2) the infra-structure to support Christians living long-term in center cities (e.g. schools, community centers, credit unions, etc.)

6. City-center people are **pragmatic rather than rational** or 'linear' in thinking. Modernity elevated action over contemplation while post-modernity created enormous skepticism about reasoning and 'truth.' Together they create a culture in which people believe 'it's true if it works for me' rather than 'it works for me because it's true.' Implications: a) We have to adapt to this. 1) We need to lift up the reality of changed lives. 2) We need to teach the Bible narratively (as about the mission of God to redeem creation through Jesus—not just a set of information.) 3) We need to create great community —because that is (according to Jesus in John 17) a crucial 'apologetic'. 4) We need to use varieties of art to embody our message, not just give talks containing long strings of logic. b) But we also must challenge pragmatism 'all the way down.' If people believe in Christ because it 'works' for them, they have fitted Christ to their individualistic world-view rather than fitting their world-view to Christ.

7. City-center people are **ironic and suspicious of authority and institutions** (especially religious ones.) Overly slick, polished, and glossy presentations are suspect. Sentimentality, earnestness, 'niceness' seems phony and manipulative. There is disdain for the obvious in art and communication. Ministry implications: Leadership must take great pains to be open, not to hide information or be 'political.' Worship leading and music can't be 'bathetic', slurpy, and manipulative. Don't use 'we-them' language. Don't be disrespectful to doubters. Communication tone must be free from evangelical tribal jargon. Humor is extremely important (but use gentle, humble irony—not broad humor nor cutting humor.) Most of all—admit how faith and religion can be used to oppress people and show that the gospel is the strongest critique of 'religion.' But also challenge relentless cynicism. Deconstruct deconstruction, show that doubts are really very self-serving alternate beliefs.

8. City-center culture is very **multi-ethnic and international**, much more so than suburbs or even than inner city areas. Ministry implications: It is crucial for center-city churches to be as deliberately multi-ethnic as possible and to promote and celebrate diversity-unity in Christ as evidence of the gospel's power. Stress the gospel's resources for embracing the 'Other.' The more dominant cultural groups must humble themselves and 'stretch' to make room for those less well represented. Great care must be taken not to allow the church to be too beholden to one political party or political agenda—or cultural diversity will be hard to maintain. (And evangelism will be hard to do!) At the same time, each multi-ethnic church will be unavoidably different from the others, because the percentages/ethnic make up of each church *will* be different.

9. City-center people are **deeply concerned for justice and the poor**. At least in principle! Most center-city people because of their international connection and education are less parochial and have a theoretical commitment to helping the poor, but their jobs and consumer identities prevent them from much concrete action on behalf of others. Ministry implications: a) Show that the gospel *is* the faith of choice for the poor of the world. They don't embrace secularism, but Jesus! b) Show the resources of Christianity for having hope in the future. At the end of the Bible we don't see individuals being taken out of the world into heaven but heaven coming down to renew the world and cleanse it of evil, disease, injustice, death. c) Your church cannot simply do the typical

'charity' and volunteer programs. The church has to ask how it is going to really make a difference in its city for the poor. Most important of all—is to have *an extremely positive view of your city*. Tell people the purpose of your ministry is not simply to create a great church but a great city. The church is there for the common good of the whole city (Jer 29: 4ff.)

## B. Early history and sources of Redeemer's ministry

### • **Early history**

- My wife and I began Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan in 1989. We were sent by our denomination (PCA) to do so.
- We divided the city into four extremely broad groups: a) center city professionals, b) English speaking working/middle class (black and white), c) new immigrant working/middle class, d) the poor. We recognized that three of the four-a,c,d-were growing and were ripe for new ministries though most of the existing evangelical churches were in the shrinking group. We decided to begin with center-city professionals because the center of the metro area is the demographic and geographic key to the whole. Students, young professionals, immigrants come to the center first and then move out. So we went to the center to reach the whole.
- I discovered a ministry to young urban professionals (DeMoss house) that had brought several dozen people to faith. These new Christians did not have a church yet and had lots of non-Christian friends. About 40 of them came to begin the church and they were the key to it all.
- The first three years were wonderful, a 'revival' by Richard Lovelace's standards. About 100-200 people a year were converted and the church grew to almost 1,000 in attendance by 1991. This was during a recession and a time in which very few people (especially not Christians) were moving in to the city. There was virtually no 'transfer' growth.
- Today there are about 4200 people coming in four services. The attendance is nearly 70% single, average age is about 30, and is 45% Asian, 45% Anglo, 10% black, Hispanic, and other cultural groups. We have planted 11 daughter churches in the metro NYC area and have given heavy to light assistance several dozen others.
- **Sources** Redeemer had an interesting balance of emphases and practices that formed a 'chemistry' that engaged people.
  - Our worship was more liturgical and sacramental and our music very eclectic. This fit both the sensibilities of New Yorkers and my own beliefs about resisting consumerism. Calvin was quite big on liturgy and the sacraments.
  - We aimed to create a counter-culture of justice and peace which works for the common good of the city. We were much concerned about the new heavens and new earth—about 'hope' in the N.T.Wright and Moltmann sense. I learned this from Reformed thinkers like Ridderbos.
  - Our apologetics are very Newbiginian, largely because I recognized in Newbigin the apologetics of the Dutch Calvinists like Kuyper and Dooyeweerd who I always loved.
  - Yet (despite all this emphasis on the church, the sacraments, and justice) we carefully deconstruct legalism like Luther and Kierkegaard do and we emphasize individual conversion experience like Jonathan Edwards (as I learned it through Lovelace).
  - And I believe in the importance of narrative preaching—following Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot*. Put that together with typical Christo-centric preaching ala Vos and you have it.

All of this is classically Reformed, but in every case the older Reformed thinkers anticipated moves that now are being incorporated by those who are seeking to reach post-moderns. I just drew on the classical resources to help me think things through more theologically.

## C. Ministry marks of effective city-center churches.

### 1. Contextualize the gospel so traditional, modern, po-mo 'get it' and are challenged.

The basic world-view of a person or a culture is an answer to the question: *What is really wrong with the world (or people, or life) and how can it be fixed?* Every culture has a world-view-story. The job of the missionary is to enter sympathetically the world-view-story of the culture yet *challenge* and *re-tell* the culture's story so they see their story will only have a happy ending through Jesus.

#### a. Show that the religious are running from God as much as the non-religious.

- Message: *The irreligious and immoral are running from God. But the religious and moral are running from God as much as are the irreligious. How? To think you can be blessed by God by being good is to be your own Savior and leads you to think God owes you (so you are in control of him.) Thus religion and irreligion are just two different ways of accomplishing the same thing-- being your own Savior and Lord.*
- Exposition:
  - 'Religion' works on a principle of 'if I live like this--I'll be saved/blessed'. But the gospel operates on the principle of 'I'm saved/blessed in Christ--therefore I will live like this.'

- Religion motivates through fear and pride; the gospel motivates through grace and joy. These are two radically different paths, though the adherents of each sit in church pews together each week—both striving to read the Bible, be good, pray—but for completely different reasons. Religion produces either superiority (if you’ve lived up to your standards) or inferiority (if you haven’t) but either way you are driven by radical insecurity. And religion leads you to exclude others who are not as righteous as you.
- The difference between a Pharisee and a Christian is not repentance for sins. Pharisees repent of sins! What makes you a Christian is you also repent of self-righteousness, your self-salvation. You repent not only for the bad things you’ve done but also for the reason you’ve done all your good things—to control God and save yourself. To see that and change that brings about radical conversion, puts your identity and all your relationships on a whole new footing. (See below under 2a for how.)
- Contextualization issues: a) The traditional need this message or they will settle into moralism and self-righteousness and think they have a grasp on Christianity. b) The post-modern and modern need to hear this message. Most people who think they’ve rejected Christianity have actually rejected some form of ‘religion’. If they don’t see the difference they’ll never give real Christianity a chance.
- ‘Religion’ is the default mode of the human heart. Christians who know the gospel in principle continually revert to religion—they believe the gospel at one level but at deeper levels we continue to operate as if we are saved by our works, they continue to base their standing with God and their view of themselves on their spiritual and moral performance. This leads all sorts of anxiety, pride, inferiority, anger, and spiritual deadness.
- Every culture tends toward its own *kind* of ‘religion’/moralism/self-salvation. Traditional culture makes a ‘savior’ out of family and being good; modern culture makes a ‘savior’ out of individual fulfillment; post-modern culture makes a ‘savior’ out of group identity and inclusion. All will lead to exclusion and radical insecurity.

**b. Show that secular/non-religious are just as spiritually enslaved as the religious.**

- Message: *Sin is building your identity--finding your greatest meaning, significance and security--in something besides God. Everyone is centering their lives on something and whatever that is is by definition and function a) your ‘god’—something you adore and serve with your whole heart and b) your ‘savior’—something you have to have or spiritually and emotionally you feel totally insignificant and meaningless. So even the seemingly most ‘non-religious’ are living lives of worship, working for their ‘salvation’ though not expressing it so to themselves.*
- Exposition:
  - This way to form identity leads (inwardly) to slavery because we are driven to achieve those things we must have to be happy. If we build our lives on human approval we are a slave to opinion. If we build our life on academic or economic or artistic achievement we are a slave to our career. In any case we do not control ourselves—we are controlled by the what we live for. When we make even the best things (family, work, romance, etc) into *ultimate* things and ways to get significance and joy, then they drive us into the ground because we *have* to have them. If we lose a good thing, it makes us sad. If we lose an ultimate thing (an idol) it devastates us.
  - This way to form identity leads (outwardly) to oppress and exclude ‘the Other’ because we *must* disdain those who do not have the same identity-factors as we have. If you build your identity on being very hard working or moral you *must* disdain those who are lazy or immoral. If you build your identity on your social class or national identity you *must* disdain those of different classes or races.
  - Jesus is the only Savior and Lord who a) if you find him, will fulfill you, and b) when you fail him, can forgive you. If you live for career success and you fail, your career can’t ‘die for your sins.’ Rather, your failure will punish you with self-disdain all of your life. But Jesus gave his life a ‘ransom’ for us. ‘Ransom’ is the payment that releases from captivity and slavery.
- Contextualization issues: Modern and post-modern people must be given this (perfectly Biblical) definition of sin. If you define sin only as ‘breaking God’s law’—contemporary people will not be able to identify themselves as sinners. They will say, ‘Well, but who is to say this or that is a sin? I don’t think it is wrong to have sex if you really love one another’ etc. But if you define sin more broadly as false identity and idolatry, as making anything (even a good thing) into an ultimate thing, then you give modern and po-mo listeners a concept of sin they are familiar with (addiction) and cannot so easily dismiss as irrelevant to them, because they *know* they are building their identity on something besides God, even if they believe in some general way in God.

**c. Show how Christ’s redemption restores identity and community.**

- Message: *Both religious moralism and non-religious idolatry lead to a) an unstable identity and b) superiority and exclusion of the ‘Other’—those who are of sharply different view-point and culture. But the gospel gives us an unassailably confident and gentle identity which frees us to embrace the ‘Other’ in love.*

- Exposition:
  - Religion *and* non-religion leads to an unstable identity (insecurity resulting in either arrogant superiority or fearful inferiority) because your significance is bound up in your performance or achievement. So you are humble but not confident when failing your standards, or confident but proud when living up to standards. But you'll never be sure you've 'arrived' and so you are always driven, nervous. But the gospel is that you are saved by sheer grace which a) makes you humble--you are such a sinner that Christ had to die for you) and b) makes you bold--you are so loved Jesus was glad to die for you c) at the very same time. You are both a sinner yet accepted.
  - Religion *and* non-religion leads to superiority and disdain toward the 'Other.' If your identity is based on being a hard worker you *must* feel superior to those you consider lazy. If your identity is based on being open-minded and liberal you *must* despise conservatives (and vice versa!) It all leads to exclusion. But the gospel is that a) on the Cross Christ fulfilled God's righteous law (so contra the 'relativist' mindset there are absolute moral standards by which you evaluate others,) but b) on the Cross he did it all *for* you (so contra the 'moralist' mindset there can be no superiority or haughtiness toward anyone. You are saved by sheer grace.) At the heart of the gospel is not a teacher whose standards we live up to but a savior who died for his enemies and opponents, for 'the Other' (including us.)
- Contextualization issues: a) Modern people in particular are concerned with finding the freedom to discover one's individual identity. Kierkegaard's depicts sin in *The Sickness unto Death* as 'building your identity on anything but God' which leads to psychological fragmentation and fragility. b) Post-modern people in particular are concerned with how we can live at peace in a pluralistic world. There is no religion with a more powerful ground-motif for accepting enemies and the 'Other' than Christianity. We are the only faith that has at its heart a man dying for his enemies, forgiving them rather than destroying them. This must be presented to our culture as an unparalleled resource for living in peace in a pluralistic society.

#### d. Show that the joy of grace is the key to change.

- Message: *Why do we do the wrong things we do? Look at the 10 commandments. The first and most primary is 'Have no other god-saviors before me.' Implication: You never break one of the other commandments unless you are first are breaking the 1<sup>st</sup>. You don't lie, commit adultery, or steal unless first you are making something more fundamental to your hope and joy and feelings of worth than Jesus. So a lack of joy in what Jesus has done for you is always the root cause of any failure to live as you should.*
- Exposition:
  - When you lie, for example, it is because your reputation (or money or whatever) is more foundational to your self and happiness than the love of Christ. We always sin because at that moment at that moment we don't really believe the gospel—that we are completely accepted in Christ. We are looking to something else to be what only Jesus can be to us, we are trusting something else as Savior. Or put another way, it is always a lack of joy—a lack of deep joy and rest in Christ's love and work for us—that is the reason we ever do wrong. If we were happy enough, we'd not need to do wrong.
  - Christians may believe the gospel at one level but at deeper levels continue to look to other things besides Jesus in order to feel we can stand before and face God. Even after you are converted by the gospel your heart will go back to operating on the religious principle unless you deliberately, repeatedly set it to gospel-mode. This then is the basic cause of our spiritual failures, sins, uncontrolled emotions, fightings and conflict, lack of joy, and ministry ineffectiveness. The gospel is not just the ABC of the Christian life—but the A to Z of the Christian life. This is radical! You don't believe the gospel to be saved and then move on to more advanced principles in order to grow. *All* of our personal problems and church problems come because we don't come continually back to the gospel to work it in and live it out.
  - So you cannot change your heart just through will power, through moral reformation, through learning Biblical principles and trying to carry them out. Ultimately our hearts only truly changes as we use the gospel on them to change their basic ways of operating—to change the main things we put our heart's greatest hopes in, the main things we find our heart's deepest joy and glory in.
- Contextualization issues: Both modern and post-modern people have rejected Christianity because of what they perceive to be its inner joylessness. The gospel motivation for moral behavior fits neither the traditionalist's duty-driven view of life nor the modern/po- mo's self-driven view of life. It breaks the categories, because it calls people to 'die' to themselves and yet promises that the change will come from inner joy.

## 2. Incarnate worship in non-abstract culture.

Contemporary culture has little patience for long strings of logic and for abstract thinking in general. It prefers the visual, the narrative, and the intuitive over the propositional and the rational. Now there must be a balance here. Since God gave us a book of words (rather than music or painting) and forbid making images of himself there is

much about Christianity that encourages discursive thought. Truth is not less than 'propositional' (specific statements that are either true or false) but quite a bit more. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the incarnation and the forms of the Bible give us lots of resources for appealing to a non-abstract culture, especially in worship.

#### a. With Christ-centric, experiential preaching.

##### **Christ-centric**

- People in our society will respond to narrative and story. They tend not to like the older kind of preaching that simply enunciated doctrinal principles. Neither will they be as excited about the newer user-friendly sermons of seeker-churches on "How to Handle Fear," "How to Balance Your Life," etc. But there is a danger that 'post-modern' preaching will devolve into mainly poetic story-telling rather than expounding the truth.
- In Luke 24 we learn that every single part of the Bible is really about Jesus. The Christ-centric preaching approach sees the whole Bible as essentially one big story with a central plot-line: God restores the world lost in Eden by intervening in history to call out and form a new humanity. This intervention climaxes in Jesus Christ, who accomplishes salvation for us what we could not accomplish for ourselves. While only a minority of Biblical passages actually *give* the whole story-line, every Biblical text must be placed in the whole story-line to be understood. In other words, every text must be asked: "what does this tell me about the salvation we have in Christ?" to be understood.
- This understanding of preaching, then, turns *all* preaching into 'narrative preaching' even if it is an exposition of Deuteronomy, Proverbs, or James. Every sermon is a story in which the plot of the human dilemma thickens, and the hero that comes to the rescue is Jesus. Christ-centric preaching converts doctrinal lectures or little how-to talks into 'narrative' preaching, but it is still careful, close Biblical exposition of texts.

##### **Experiential.**

- People in our society do not just want intellectual propositions. For them life's meaning is grounded in what they experience. If we understand the purpose of preaching is not only to make the truth *clear* but also to make the truth *real* to the hearts of the listeners, we will have a kind of preaching that is committed to objective truth and, at the same time, deeply experiential.
- The 'informational' view of preaching conceives of preaching as changing people's lives *after* the sermon. They listen to the sermon, take notes, and then apply the Biblical principles during the week. But this assumes that our main problem is a lack of compliance to Biblical principles, when (as we saw above) all our problems are actually due to a lack of joy and belief in the gospel. Our real problem is that Jesus' salvation is not as 'real to our hearts' as the significance and security our idols promise us. If that's our real problem, then the purpose of preaching is to so make Christ so real to the heart that *in the sermon* people have an experience of his grace and the false saviors that drive us lose their power and grip on us *on the spot*. That's the 'experiential' view of preaching (Jonathan Edwards.)
- Example:
  - Think of how we ordinarily try to instill honesty in children and youth: "If you lie, you'll get in trouble with God and others" or else "if you lie then you will be like those terrible people, those liars, and you are better than that!" But look at these last two statements! What motivations are you bringing to bear on them to change their behavior? Fear (*you'll get in trouble*) and pride (*you'll be like a dirty liar.*)
  - But if you stir up and use sin (fear and pride) to get people to do the right thing—then you aren't actually changing the heart. You aren't getting at the fundamental self-regard and self-absorption of the human heart. You aren't uprooting the idolatry (of human approval, etc.) You are actually *strengthening* the fear and pride and manipulating or jury-rigging it to make render a new behavior. You are, as it were, *bending* the person into a different pattern of fear and pride rather than *melting* them into a new shape through enough joy and love and gratitude. But if you 'bend' your heart like a piece of metal then either you will break it or it will finally just snap back.
  - How does true honesty grow? (i.e. an integrity born of a heart-restructuring encounter with God's grace rather than an honesty born of a jury-rigged proud/fearful heart?) It grows when I see him dying for me, keeping a promise he made despite the infinite suffering it brought him. Now that *a*) *destroys pride* on the one hand, because he had to do this for me--I am so lost! But that also *b*) *destroys fear* on the other hand, because if he'd do this for me while I'm an enemy, then he values me infinitely, and nothing I can do will wear out his love for me. Then my heart is not just restrained by changed. Its fundamental orientation is transformed.

##### **Summary**

- Most preaching in both conservative and liberal churches is moralistic and informational. It tells people (usually rightly) how they should behave and live but it implies (often through silence) that the reason they should live like this is so God will bless them, so they will go to heaven, so they will be able to say they are part of God's people, so their life will 'work' better. But the fundamental questions every sermon should address is a) *Why* do I have trouble living right? (Answer-because in some way I don't really believe the gospel or rest and rejoice in who Jesus is

and what he did for me.) b) *Why* should I live this particular way? (Answer--because Jesus lived this way *for* me at infinite cost and this removes my need to live in any other way.)

- Ultimately, moral people who are being moral out of fear and pride are being moral for themselves. They may be kind to others and helpful to the poor at one level, but at the deeper level they are doing it so God will bless them (religious version) or so they can think of themselves as virtuous, charitable persons (secular version). They don't do good for God's sake or for goodness' sake or for others' sake but for their own sake. If preaching motivates people to follow Biblical principles out of fear of rejection (by God and others) or out of pride (so they can feel superior to others) rather than out of deep joy in what Jesus is to us and has done to us--such preaching actually *nurtures* the fundamental self-centeredness and works-righteousness of the human heart. That is why so many churches are plagued with gossip and fighting. Or why so many apparently moral people can fall so suddenly into great sins. Underneath the seeming morality is great self-centeredness and self-righteousness left untouched by preaching.

#### **b. Artistic excellence and liturgical richness in worship.**

- Here we get into choppy waters! I do not believe there is just one 'style' of worship that will reach everyone in city-centers. City-centers as we have seen are the most culturally diverse places on earth—more so even than inner cities. And in general:
  - Classical music and liturgy appeals to highly educated and older persons. "High" cultural forms are those that, by definition, require training to appreciate.
  - Praise/Worship approaches are far more likely to bring together a diversity of racial groups--Black, Hispanic, Asian.
  - Younger professional Anglos, especially of the artistic bent are attracted to the 'fusion' of liturgical/historical with the most contemporary musical forms.
  - Baby Boomer families are very attracted to 'Seeker Sensitive' worship and the more a-historical, sentimental earlier Christian contemporary songs.
- Nevertheless, there is some real potential in the movement of what could be called 'fusion' worship (or Ancient-Future worship) in which rich liturgical and sacramental worship is combined with both classical and contemporary music.
  - It probably will be less off-putting to non-Christians than Praise/Worship. The post-modern need for roots, narrative, and experience is not met well by a-historical Seeker-sensitive contemporary worship (which is often called 'cheesy'.) The post-modern skepticism and fear of emotional manipulation turns them off to the more emotionally intense and sentimental charismatic contemporary worship. Yet its emphasis on experience make it far less cognitive/ rational than the straight Protestant free church worship. And it's willingness to mix in contemporary elements will make it more accessible than the straight Liturgical.
  - There is a lot of silliness going on, however. A warehouse is bought, icons are projected on the wall, candles are lit everywhere--all this to evoke as sense of tradition, history, timelessness, and mystery. But often these churches are not embedded in any *actual* tradition. Unless the churches get embedded in a real ecclesial and theological tradition (Reformed, Anglican, Orthodox, Catholic, Free church, Lutheran, Methodist, Holiness, etc.) they won't last. The pastiche of traditional elements won't cohere and ultimately serve as a kind of marketing.
  - One more point. The strength and power of African Anglicanism shows that the liturgical can be combined with emotionally expressive contemporary music and sensibilities. So this 'ecumenical fusion' may have a bright future as world Christianity increasingly becomes non-white.
- As noted above, the music and art must be excellent. Since a variety of music is needed in city-center churches (not just white soft-pop) it takes a much greater skill-set to produce the music than an amateur 'worship-band.'

### **3. "Missional" mindset: that shapes Christians and includes non-Christians together.**

In Acts 2 and I Cor. 14:23ff we see non-believers attracted and challenged by worship. We learn 1) nonbelievers are expected in worship, 2) non-believers must find worship challenging and comprehensible, not comfortable. In city-centers where there are a mixture of world-views it is crucial to include both Christians and non-Christians in the same service—even in many of the other meetings and ministries of the church. It's not best to segregate them (ala Willow Creek) or exclude them (as the typical conservative church does.) Why?

- In a "mixed" group, when the preacher speaks somewhat more to non-Christians, the Christians present learn how to share the faith. This is extremely important today. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Christians to just share the gospel without doing apologetics. The old canned quickie training programs cannot prepare a Christian for dealing with the range of intellectual and personal difficulties people have with the Christian faith. They need to hear the preacher week in and week out dealing winsomely and intelligently with the problems of non-believers. This excellent "training".
- On the other hand, when the preacher speaks more to Christians, the non-Christians present come to see how Christianity "works". More deeply secular "po-mo" non-Christians tend to decide on the faith on more

pragmatic grounds. They do not examine in a detached intellectual way. They also are much more likely to make their commitment through a long process of mini-decisions. They will want to try Christianity on, see how it fits their problems and how it fleshes out in real life.

- In short, a center-city church should not only 'do mission' or 'do evangelism.' Every part of its ministry should be geared routinely to contain non-Christians and to expect non-Christians to be 'over-hearing' what we are saying and doing. How?

**a. Keep the quality of speaking, music, and program very high**--which is more inclusive. How? For example, if you know the musician personally, but the musician isn't very good, you still get something out of the musical 'offering.' If you don't know the musician and the music isn't good—you get nothing out of it! So the better the quality of the art, the more 'inclusive' it is to outsiders and guests.

**b. Discourse in the vernacular.** in conducting worship, preaching, teaching, small groups.

- Post-modern people are extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of 'artifice' to them. Anything that is too polished, too controlled, too canned--seems like salesmanship. They will be turned off if they hear the preacher use non-inclusive gender language, or make cynical remarks about other religions, or use tones of voice that they consider artificial.
- Do not avoid the use of Biblical terminology, but take great pains to explain such terms in ways that are readily understandable to those without theological background. Especially avoid citing the Bible or making explanations with tone 'Everyone intelligent knows this!'
- Avoid-- sentimental, pompous, austere, archaic, colloquial, or emotionally manipulative 'inspirational' talk. Avoid 'tribal' language--unnecessarily stylized evangelical pious jargon and archaic language that seeks to set a 'spiritual tone.' (e.g. typical 'prayer language') Avoid 'we-them' language--disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs, and dismissive, disrespectful comments about those who differ with us.
- Instead engage with gentle, self-deprecating but joyful irony the gospel creates. There is a true 'gospel-irony' and realism that is a mixture of humility and joy. We also work to not 'run ahead' of non-believers in being so emotionally expressive that we 'leave them behind' or scare them. Unless all this is the outflow of a truly gospel-changed heart, it is all just marketing and 'spin.'

**c. Speak to include both Christians and non-Christians in the same meetings.**

- Keep emotion and sentimentality under control. The average educated non-Christian feels excluded by intense emotion in the service.
- Logic. Do not assume that the people out there all have the same premises. never exhort point "D" if it is based on "A, B, and C"--without referring to A, B, C. Constantly lay 'groundwork' statements about the authority of the Bible, or the reasons we believe, etc.
- Apologetic sidebars. Try to devote one of the three or four sermon points more to non-believers. Keep in your head a list of the 10 or so biggest objections people had to Christianity. More often than not the particular Scripture text has some way to address them.
- Application. You have to literally address non-Christians AND Christians, almost doing dialogue with them. "If you are committed to Christ, you may be thinking this--but the text answers that fear." or "If you are not a Christian or not sure what you believe, then you surely must think that this is narrow-minded--but the text says this, that speaks to this very issue."
- Ground teaching in cultural references and authorities your listeners trust. It is critical to 'keep up' in order to preach in New York City. In general, my audience does not trust the Bible very much, and so I need to generously document and support my points with corroborating opinions from all the books and periodicals that the professionals of New York City read. If I read what they read, then a) I can use the Bible to answer the questions that are on their minds, not my mind, b) I can show how often 'the Bible already was teaching this' long before this contemporary authority said it.
- In general talk as if non-believing people were present even if they aren't.
  - Always, always expect to be overheard by members of the non-believing press. Continually address concerns of the wider community, not just of the Christians. Show how the grace of God favors the poor, outsiders. Celebrate deeds of justice and mercy and common citizenship in the community.
  - Constantly anticipate and address the concerns, objections, and reservations of the skeptical or of 'spiritual pilgrims' with the greatest respect and sympathy. Always express doubting points of view very, very persuasively and respectfully before you answer them. E.g. Don't ever say, "The Bible says this!" without adding, "now I know that sounds outrageous to some of you—but I hope you'll consider this..." If you don't add that you make the doubters present feel invisible, like their concerns don't matter. (This must be a true spiritual respect, not 'put on.' If the gospel is affecting you, you will be deeply sympathetic with those who struggle to believe. Never haughty.)
  - If you speak and discourse *as if* your whole neighborhood is present eventually more and more of your neighborhood will find their way in or be invited. Why? 1) Po-mo people 'try on' Christianity through dozens of 'mini-decisions'. They want to see how it works. 2) Speak in this way and

Christians will feel free to include church events as part of their friendship-building. Otherwise, they simply won't! Most Christians, even when they are very edified in church, know intuitively that their non-Christian friends would not appreciate the service. What you want is for a Christian to come to your church and say, "oh! I wish my non-Christian friend could see (or hear) this!" If this is forgotten, soon even a growing church will be filled with Christians who commute in from various towns and communities far and wide rather than filling up with Christians and seekers from your church's immediate neighborhoods.

- Solve people's problems with the gospel, not just with 'trying harder' to live according to the Bible.
  - How? At the root of all Christian failures to live right--i.e. not give their money generously, not tell the truth, not care for the poor, not handle worry and anxiety--is the sin under all sins, the sin of unbelief, of not rejoicing deeply in God's grace in Christ, not living out of our new identity in Christ. This means that every week in a different way the minister must apply the gospel of salvation by grace through faith through Christ's work. Thus every week the non-Christians get exposed to the gospel, and in its most practical and varied forms. (Not just in a repetitious 'Four Spiritual Laws' way.) That's what pragmatic post-moderns need.
  - More deeply secular "po-mo" non-Christians tend to decide on the faith on more pragmatic grounds. They do not examine in a detached intellectual way. They also are much more likely to make their commitment through a long process of mini-decisions. They will want to try Christianity on, see how it fits their problems and how it fleshes out in real life. They must be allowed that process.
  - Sum: If the Sunday service and sermon aim primarily at evangelism, it will bore the saints. If they aim primarily at education, they will bore and confuse unbelievers. If they aim at *praising the God who saves by sheer grace* they will both instruct the saints and challenge the sinners.

**Note:** The above does not just apply to worship services. Everything about the church assumes that it is processing people (even many professing Christians) with world-views that are very different from the gospel. It will take multiple exposures to the gospel in numerous perspectives before world-view change occurs. We assume the presence of people of different world-views to be present in most aspects of the church's life. We don't, then, simply need churches that have evangelism programs tacked on to a congregation that in every other regard assumes the presence of conservative, traditional people, but rather *missional* churches. That does not mean that everything we do is designed to 'convert people', but that every part of the church is being contextualized and adapted to simply be Christian 'gospel people' of service in a culture of people *not* Christianized and who have modern and 'post-modern' sensibilities.

### **Case Study - Small groups**

Let me show you how this goes beyond any program. A 'missional' church has this outward focus to everything. So, for example, what makes a small group 'missional'? A missional small group is not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific 'evangelism' program (though that is to be recommended.) Rather, 1) if its members love and talk positively about the city/neighborhood, 2) if they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language, 3) if in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture, 4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically, 5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, 6) they do not bash other Christians and churches--*then* seekers and non-believing people from the city A) will be invited and B) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these marks are not there it will only be able to include believers or traditional, "Christianized" people.

### **4. Produce ministry along five "ministry fronts"**

City-center churches should have as equal as possible emphases on: a) welcoming, attracting, and engaging secular/non-Christian people, b) character change through deep community and small groups, c) wholistically serving the city (and especially the poor) in both word and deed, d)producing cultural leaders who integrate faith and work in society, and e)routinely multiplying itself into new churches with the same vision. There are many churches that major on one or two of these but the breadth, balance, and blend of these commitments is rare in a church. Nevertheless, this balance is crucial for ministry in city-centers.

#### **a. Outward face-engagement with secular people.**

- The gospel removes any sense of superiority toward those who don't share our beliefs. We respect and remember what it is like to seriously doubt Christianity. We therefore expect not-yet-believers in most every facet of Redeemer's ministry and life, and we make every effort to engage and address their questions and concerns.
- One of the main ways we do this is with the 'missional' mindset that makes worship and small groups a place where Christians and non-Christians grow together. (See #3 above.)

- In general the church's communication and preaching must continually 'chip away' at the main 'defeaters', the main, widely held objections to Christianity that form an 'implausibility structure' keeping most people from solid faith thought because 'all the smart people I know don't believe Christianity'. Here are the main ones in U.S. cities today:
  - The other religions. "No one should insist their view of God better than all the rest. All religions are equally valid."
  - Evil and suffering. "A good all-powerful God wouldn't allow this evil and suffering. Therefore this God doesn't exist or can't be trusted."
  - The ethical straitjacket. "We *must* be free to choose for ourselves how to live—no one can impose this on us. this is the only truly authentic life."
  - The record of Christians. "If Christianity is *the* true religion why would so much oppression happened in history with the support of the church?"
  - The angry God. "Christianity is built around a condemning, judgmental deity, who demands blood sacrifice even to forgive."
  - The unreliable Bible. "The Bible can't be trusted historically or scientifically and much of its teaching is socially regressive."
  - Sum: A city-center church today must use 'pre-suppositional' reasoning more than the old evidential approach. It has to show that all doubts and objections to Christianity are themselves alternate beliefs and faith-acts. (If you say, "I just can't believe that there is only one true religion"—that is a faith-act. You can't prove that.) And when you see you're your doubts are really beliefs, and when you require the same amount of evidence for them that you are asking of Christian beliefs, then it becomes evident many of them are very weak and largely adopted because of cultural pressure. The city-center church redundantly weaves responses to these defeaters into everything you say and teach so that people inside the community 'in process' will have these major barriers to faith removed.
- In general the church's communication and preaching must also must continually lay down important building blocks toward robust faith. In more Christian cultures 'Christendom' evangelism was simpler. Now it requires more of a process:
  - Deconstruct your doubts. Your doubts are really beliefs, and you can't avoid betting your life and destiny on *some* kind of belief in God and the universe. Non-commitment' is impossible. Faith-acts are inevitable. (See above.)
  - Realize you already know there's God. You actually already believe in God at the deep level, whatever you tell yourself intellectually. Our outrage against injustice despite how natural it is (in a world based on natural selection) shows that we already do believe in God at the most basic level, but are suppressing that knowledge for our convenience. The Christian view of God means world is not the product of violence or random disorder (as in both the ancient and modern accounts of creation) but was created by a Triune God to be a place of peace and community. So at the root of all reality is not power and individual self-assertion (as in the pagan and post-modern view of things) but love and sacrificial service for the common good.
  - Recognize your biggest problem. You aren't spiritually free. No one is. Everyone is spiritually enthralled to something. 'Sin' is not simply breaking rules but is building your identity on things other than God, which leads internally to emptiness, craving, and spiritual slavery and externally to exclusion, conflict, and social injustice.
  - Discern the difference between religion and the gospel. There is a radical difference between religion—in which we believe our morality secures for us a place of favor in God and in the world—and gospel Christianity—in which our standing with God is strictly a gift of grace. These two different core understandings produce very different communities and character. The former produces both superiority and inferiority complexes, self-righteousness, religiously warranted strife, wars, and violence. The latter creates a mixture of both humility and enormous inner confidence, a respect for 'the Other', and a new freedom to defer our needs for the common good.
  - Understand the Cross. All forgiveness entails suffering and that the only way for God to forgive us and restore justice in the world without destroying us was to come into history and give himself and suffer and die on the Cross in the person of Jesus Christ. Both the results of the Cross (freedom from shame and guilt; awareness of our significance and value) and the pattern of the Cross (power through service, wealth through giving, joy through suffering) radically changes the way we relate to God, ourselves, and the world.
  - Embrace the resurrection. Because there is no historically possible alternative explanation of the rise of the Christian church than the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if Jesus was raised from the dead as a forerunner of the renewal of all the material and physical world, then this gives Christians both incentive to work to restore creation (fighting poverty, hunger, and injustice) as well as infinite hope that our labors will not be in vain. And finally, it eliminates the fear of death.
- Practical points:
  - A church that continually chips away at defeaters and continually lays down the basic building blocks of faith in all its services and meetings will actually be training Christians within the basic

weekly gatherings on how to do evangelism within their culture. Much evangelism then happens naturally. Christians talk more wisely to non-Christian friends and have the confidence to bring them to church meetings because they trust the attractiveness and intelligibility of what will happen there. Some non-Christians will always be getting converted in the ordinary meetings of the church and they in turn will bring others. Ultimately this is the most powerful dynamic for evangelism. Evangelistic programs won't help if the church itself isn't permeated with the 'missional mindset.'

- This does not preclude evangelistic programs at all! If the church's basic ministry and mindset is missional, then specific, focused evangelistic outreaches and programs will be highly effective.

#### **b. Christian community which is counter-cultural.**

- God's purpose in history is not simply to save individual souls but to create a new humanity, a 'people' with a communal life that reflects in some degree the future kingdom of God.
- In Christendom, 'fellowship' was basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support and accountability. That is necessary, of course. But when surrounded by a very non-Christian culture, Christian community takes on additional importance.
  - First, must go beyond to embody a 'counter-culture,' showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power. We must show sex, money, and power being used in life-giving ways, and to see people united in love who could never have been brought together without the power of the gospel to humble, affirm, and transform our identity.
    - With sex: We avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different.
    - With money: We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the economically and physically weak. We also must do radical economic sharing with one another—so 'there is no needy among us.'
    - With power: We are committed to power-sharing and relationship-building between races and classes that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. The practical evidence of this is that we need to be as multi-ethnic a body as possible.
  - Second, we must practice Christian unity as much as possible at the city level. In Christendom, when it seemed like 'everyone was a Christian', it was necessary (perhaps) for a church to define itself over against other churches. That is, to get an identity you had to say, "we are not like that church over there, or those Christians over here."
    - Today, however, it is much more illuminating and helpful for a church to define itself over against 'the world'--the values of the non-Christian culture. It is important that we not spend our time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That simply plays into the common 'defeater' that Christians are all intolerant.
    - While we have to align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate and reach out to and support the other congregations and churches in our local area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.
- Practical points:
  - In the vast majority (if not all) city-center churches small groups or cell groups will be crucial. In such places there are fewer extended families or intact neighborhoods to provide social support.
  - Building community in a city-center is the most challenging of the five ministry fronts, largely because of the mobility of the population. City-centers are very expensive and difficult places to live, most people are working enormously long hours while there, and most people see themselves living there temporarily. This makes it difficult to build community. Some ideas:
    - You must find strategies to help short-term residents get into small groups quickly. You can't leave it up to individual persistence.
    - You encourage Christians to 'settle down' and raise their families in the city (Jer 29) but to do that you must build infra-structure (schools, credit unions, housing.)
    - The most practical way to build community is to build into people a positive view of the city. By a "positive" view of the city we do not mean a simple celebration of everything within it. We are neither to condemn it or just celebrate it--but to *love* it and see it as the most strategic place possible for Christians to live and serve.

#### **c. Wholistic ministry for the whole city and especially for the poor.**

- The purpose of redemption is not just to save the individual out of the world but to renew and restore the entire creation. Therefore God is not just concerned for the salvation of souls but also for the removal of poverty, hunger, and injustice.
  - God called the exiled Israelites to live in and seek the peace and prosperity of their pagan city of Babylon (Jer 29: 4ff.) Jesus likewise called Christians to be a city of God within the earthly city (Mt

5:14-16) showing the glory of God through our deeds of service (v.16) The citizens of God's city are to be the very *best* citizens of their earthly city, working not just for their own prosperity but for the common good of their neighbors and the whole metropolis.

- The 'Great Reversal' of the cross means that the gospel proclaims a complete reversal of the values of the world--power, recognition, status, wealth. For example, the gospel is especially welcomed by the poor and for the poor (Luke 4:18- *He has anointed me...to preach the gospel to the poor.*" Cf. also Luke 7:22.) Preaching the gospel and healing people's bodies are closely associated (Luke 9:6).
- Jesus didn't save us just with words, but mainly through his deeds, his work. And the gospel demands that every recipient of God's grace surrender the illusion of self-sufficiency. All this equips us to use our gifts and resources to love our neighbors not just in word, but through deeds of sacrificial love. The gospel removes all superiority toward the poor. It empowers us to meet individual needs in the city and also work for justice for the powerless.
- Secular people have a strong belief that religion is really just about social power. There is a need to place every church somewhere on the ideological spectrum from "Liberal/Left wing" to "Conservative/Right wing".
  - But the gospel makes the church impossible to categorize 1) Justification-by-faith brings deep, powerful psychological changes. Though I am sinful, I am accepted This "converts" people. "My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee". 2) On the other hand, the gospel of the cross and the kingdom brings deep powerful social changes. It defies the values of the world--power, status, recognition, wealth. The gospel is triumph through weakness, wealth through poverty, power through service. This changes our attitude toward the poor, toward our own status and wealth and careers. In sum: We did not want to emphasize mainly evangelism (as conservative churches do) or mainly social justice (as liberal churches do) but give a very high emphasis to both.
  - A gospel-centered church should combine 'zeals' that are ordinarily never seen together in the same church. This is one of the main way we make people look twice and take our message seriously. In 'traditional values' America a church can lack this combination will still have credibility. That is not the case on the 'secular mission field'.
- In general 'wholistic' ministry should have three focuses:
  - First, within the church community itself there should be radical sharing of economic resources. We should care for one another's practical needs—economic, social, physical, medical, emotional—with the utmost generosity and care.
  - Second, within the immediate neighborhood the church should show its sacrificial love by the meeting practical needs of people whether they believe as we do or not.
  - Third, throughout the whole city the church should seek to serve and lift up the poor.

#### **d. Equipping people for cultural renewal through the integration of faith and work.**

The gospel brings us a unique perspective on God, human nature, the material world, the direction of history, the importance of community. All of these inevitably influence the way we work, whether in the arts, business, government, the media or the academy. Therefore we help Christians integrate their faith with their work.

- ***Three aspects of equipping***
  - First, the laity needs theological education about how to 'think Christianly' about all of life, public and private, and about how to work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know: a) what cultural practices are common grace and to be embraced, b) what practices are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected, c) what practices can be adapted/revised.
  - Second, they need to be practically mentored, placed, and positioned in their vocations in the most advantageous way. They need cooperation with others in the field who can encourage, advise, advocate for them.
  - Third, they need spiritual support for the ups and downs of their work and accountability for living and working with Christian integrity.
- ***Three components of equipping.***
  - *The theorists.* Scholars and very successful practioners in each field theorize at a high level about what it means to be a Christian in every field of vocation including: social work, community development, politics, law, government, finance, business, counseling, medicine, education, scholarship, arts, dance, literature, theater, film, journalism, media, publishing.
  - *The educator/mentors.* Educators and practioners in each area create materials, networks, and venues for the a) support, b) training, and c) positioning-leveraging of workers in each of these areas.
  - *The church community.* Christians are recruited off of campuses to move into major cultural centers where they are trained, positioned, mentored, and all in the context of church communities that celebrate and support them as doing real 'kingdom work' and ministry in the world.

**e. A commitment to the planting of new churches constantly, routinely.**

- Premise: The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for the numerical growth of the Body of Christ, the renewal of existing churches, and the overall impact of that Body on the culture of any city. Nothing else--not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, mega-churches, consulting, nor church renewal processes--will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow raising statement. But to those who have done any study of the subject, it is not even controversial.
- City-center churches are in the very best possible place to plant churches. They have a mobile population so new converts are constantly moving to other parts of the city or the suburbs or other cities—and churches can be planted by following them and using them as core members.
- The 'church planting' mindset means city-center churches will think of church planting as just one of the things they do along with the rest--we do teaching, evangelism, discipling, worship and music, education, and church planting! Church planting should not be like building a building--one big traumatic hiccup and we are glad that's over with. Rather it is to have the mind set of Paul, who always did a) evangelism, b) discipleship, and c) church planting.
- The greatest difficulty with church planting is being sure the churches you plant are a) on the one hand, not 'cookie cutter'—they must reflect the always somewhat different demographic, the gifts of their leaders, etc, yet b) must still embody the basic 'DNA'—the basic theological vision of your church. Only if that occurs will church planting create a movement of churches related enough to one another that they can do ministries together. For example, what is the 'DNA'—the basic theological assumptions we want to pass along to our church planters and new churches? They follow. They are much more important to impart than methods, or even than 'models' (see below #6.)

**D. Theological 'DNA' of city-center churches**

**1. Depth-proclamation of the gospel.**

- The **Holiness-Love axis**. *The gospel of grace*. (cf. Luther) If I think of God as all or mainly holy—that I am saved because I am living morally according to his standards-- it does not move me to the depths to think of my salvation. I earned it. There is no joy, amazement, tears. I am not galvanized and transformed from the inside. But if I think of God as all or mainly love—and that I am saved because God just forgives and accepts everyone no matter how we live--it also does not move me to the depths to think of my salvation. There is no joy, amazement, tears. God forgives—that's his job. I am not galvanized and transformed from the inside. Any effort to take away the idea of substitutionary atonement and replace it with a moralism (being morally, working for others, imitating Jesus) robs the gospel of its power to change lives.
- The **Truth-Experience axis**. *The gift of the Spirit*. (cf. Edwards) When a Christian or a church stresses either the cognitive to the exclusion of the experiential, or the experiential to the exclusion of the cognitive, there will be a loss of renewal dynamics. They must both be stressed heavily, and they must not be pitted against each other, but seen as complementary. It is truth that we experience! Yet our experience is what makes us hungry for more truth. Some people have sound doctrine, but are threatened by the emphasis on experience and activity. Others are people who are concerned about real life and society, but who have rejected the idea of an authoritative Bible and the orthodox faith. One side will criticize revived churches as too radical, and the other as too primitive! Legalism/moralism is truth without grace (which is not real truth); relativism is grace without truth (which is not real grace). To the degree a ministry fails to do justice to both, it simply loses life-changing power.
- The **Individual-Corporate axis**. *The gospel of the Kingdom*. (cf. Ridderbos, N.T.Wright). Some conservative Christians think of the story of salvation like this—1) Fall, 2) Redemption, 3) Heaven. In this narrative, only saved people have anything of value (people in the world are simply blind and bad) and the purpose of redemption is escape from this world. But if the story of salvation is this—1) Creation, 2) Fall, 3) Redemption, 4) Restoration, then things look different. Non-Christians, created in the image of God, have much wisdom and greatness within them, even though the image is defaced and fallen. Moreover, the purpose of redemption is not to escape the world but to renew it. The gospel then is not just about individual happiness and fulfillment. It is not just a wonderful plan for 'my life' but a wonderful plan for the world--it is about the coming of God's kingdom to renew all things . The gospel creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition--all these things are marks of living in the world, and are the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26). In summary: if you lose the emphasis on conversion, on '*my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee*'—you will lose the power of the gospel for personal transformation. You will not have people who will work sacrificially, joyfully, and non-paternalistically for justice. If you lose the emphasis on the corporate—on the kingdom—you lose the power of the gospel for cultural transformation.

- The gospel is *the* dynamic for all heart-change, life-change, and social-change. Change won't happen through 'trying harder' but through encounter with the radical grace of God.

## 2. The theology and importance of cities

- The **theology** of the city.
  - The city and *refuge*. The city wall represents the fact that cities are places of refuge and justice. The density of population and the wall made it possible for city-zens to protect themselves from robbers and armies. God put his judges in cities and directed that cities of refuge be built in Israel where cases could be tried. Cities are to this day places where the weak—minorities, the poor, etc—go to find a place to live.
  - The city and *culture*. God told Adam and Eve to build a culture (*have dominion*) that honors God. They failed but when Jesus, the second Adam, completes his work, the result is a city (Revelation 21-22.) Cities continue to be the main place that the culture develops. As the city goes, so the arts, scholarship, communication, philosophy, commerce, etc. goes. People who don't live in a city are at a disadvantage. They are marginal to the centers, the places of "cultural forging."
  - The city and *witness*. The ministry of the early Christians was remarkably city-centric. Paul's missionary journeys essentially ignored the countryside. When he entered a new region, he planted churches in the biggest city, and then left! Why?
    - Personal cruciality. In the village people live in very stable environments. Thus they are suspicious of any major change. Because of the diversity and intensity of the cities, urbanites are much more open to radically new ideas--like the gospel!
    - Cultural cruciality. In the village, you might win the one or two lawyers to Christ, but if you wanted to win the legal *profession*, you need to go to the city where you have the law schools, the law journals published, etc.
    - Global cruciality. In the village, you can win only the single people group that is there, but if you want to spread the gospel into 10-20 new national groups/and languages at once, go to the city where they can all be reached through the one *lingua franca* of the place.
  - Result? *Jeremiah's urban-centric missions strategy*. "Seek the welfare of the city to which I called you" Jer 29:7. Settle down, live and work in it long term. Seek the good of the whole city in servanthood, yet in strong communities for themselves as well. *Paul's urban-centric missionary strategy*. Paul did church planting in the largest urban center of each region, because cities are the "culture forming wombs" of the society. What ever captures the cultural centers captures society. By 300 AD 50% of the urban populations of the Roman empire were Christian, while over 90% of the countryside was still pagan. But since cities are the "culture forming wombs" of the society , then whatever captures the cultural centers captures society.
  - The very best way for Christians to win and serve our society is to live in very great numbers in cities--not despising them, assimilating to them, seeking control of them, or using them for career--but loving them and seeking their peace. (Jim Boice)
- The **historic moment** for western cities.
  - Cities in western society are being flooded with people from the parts of the world (Africa, Latin America, Asia) where Christianity is growing in credibility. The grassroots population of western cities could become Christian to a greater extent than has been seen in 100 years. Over the next couple of generations those Christians will move into the city center-into the culture-forming institutions-and exert influence. Second, the younger, more multi-ethnic generations in the U.S. show much more interest in spirituality in general and Christianity in particular.
  - Two kinds of new churches are needed. First, hundreds of grassroots Christian leaders coming into NYC must be supported to plant thousands of new churches among the new residents. Second, we must produce hundreds of hundreds of 'center city' churches that would help all the new professionals coming in from outside the city and from the city's grassroots learn how to operate as Christians in a secular, pluralistic culture. If we can realize our vision of a great movement gospel-centered churches in a city as influential as NYC, we may literally see our world change.

## 3. The nature of contextualization

Contextualization is the incarnation of the gospel in a new culture. Each culture has a world-view or 'world story' at its heart. To reach a new culture the gospel must enter, challenge, and re-tells the story of the new culture.

- There are then two equal and opposite errors that can be made.
  - If the culture is not truly *entered* (that is, if the gospel communication comes in the undiluted cultural-form of its sender,) then the receptors will have a 'cultural conversion.' They do not actually encounter God, but simply adopt the culture of the sender.

- If, on the other hand, the culture is not truly *challenged* and re-worked (that is, if the basic idol(s) of the culture are not really removed,) then the receptors also have only a 'cultural conversion.' They simply get a lightly 'Christianized' version of their own culture!
- *Every* expression and embodiment of Christianity *is* contextualized. There is no such thing as a universal, a-historical expression of Christianity. Jesus didn't come to earth as a generalized being--by becoming human he had to become a *particular* human. He was male, Jewish, working-class. If he was to be human had to come socially and culturally-situated person.
  - So the minute we begin to minister we must 'incarnate', even as Jesus did. *Actual* Christian practices must have both a Biblical form or shape as well as a cultural form or shape. For example, the Bible clearly directs us to use music to praise God--but as soon as we choose a music to use enter a culture. As soon as we choose a language, as soon as we choose a vocabulary, as soon as we choose a particular level of emotional expressiveness and intensity, as soon as we choose even an illustration as an example for a sermon--we are moving toward the social context of some people and away from the social context of others. At Pentecost, everyone heard the sermon in his or her own language and dialect. But since Pentecost, we can never be 'all things to all people' *at the very same time*. So adaptation to culture is inevitable.
  - This is not relativism! *"No truth which human beings may articulate can ever be articulated in a culture-transcending way--but that does not mean that the truth thus articulated does not transcend culture."* (D.A.Carson) It is important to keep the balance of this statement! If you forget the first half you'll think there is only one true way to communicate the gospel. If you forget the second half you'll lose your grip on the fact that nonetheless there is only one true gospel. Either way you will be ineffective in ministry. Paul does not change the gospel--but he adapts it very heavily. Sure this opens the door to abuses, but to fear and refuse to adapt to culture opens to abuses of gospel just as much! The balance is to not, on one hand succumb to relativism nor, on the other hand, think contextualization is really avoidable. Both are gospel-eroding errors.
- Summary:
  - If we over-adapt to a culture we are trying to reach, it means we have bought in to that culture's idols. We are allowing that culture too much authority. For example, we may take a good theme (e.g. "the freedom of the individual" in the West--which fits with the 'priesthood of all believers') and allow it to be an idol (e.g. "individualism" so our church can't do pastoral accountability and discipline).
  - If, on the other hand we under-adapt to a culture, it means we have accepted our own culture's idols. We are forgetting that our own version of Christianity is in large part not Biblical but simply cultural.
  - To the degree a ministry is over or under adapted, it loses culture-transforming power. It is therefore impossible to avoid the very real dangers of contextualization by simply holding on to the old, familiar ways. That would be as much of a cultural trap as to over-adapt.
- End-note. City-centers are dense and diverse and there are always a lot of new young residents who are just moved in to town to 'make it'. They are often culturally unlike the long-time residents (the corporate and cultural leaders, etc.) It is quite easy to fail to contextualize to the city-center, to simply offer up a suburban model of ministry (not tapping into the city's cultural narratives, not speaking in the city's voice) and still draw a crowd! The church must continually ask itself whether it is really reaching the longer-time residents or simply gathering the outsiders and the short-termers.

#### 4. Cruciality of church planting. Why is church planting so important?

- Evangelism is by far the most effective in the context of a local church. People who are 'evangelized' in the context of an on-going worshipping and shepherding community are much more likely to come home into vital, saving faith.
- New churches are by far the best way to reach 1) new generations, 2) new residents, and 3) new people groups.
- New churches best reach the unchurched--period. The average new church gains most of its new members from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations.
- New churches are the only ministries that become self-supporting and expand the base for all other ministries.
- New churches are the best single way to re-vitalize older congregations in the area. New churches help the overall Body of Christ by a) showcasing new ministry forms and ideas that would never have been adopted in older churches, b) creating an 'it *can* be done' mindset in older churches, c) providing many new converts in the city that find their way to older churches, d) supporting many new ministries that have city-wide benefits.
- The only wide scale way to bring in lots of new Christians to the Body of Christ in a permanent way is to plant new churches. To throw this into relief, imagine Town-A and Town-B and Town-C are the same size, and they each have 100 churches of 100 persons each. But in Town-A, all the churches are over 15 years old, and then the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town will be shrinking, even if four or five of the churches get very 'hot' and double in attendance. In Town-B, 5 of the churches are under 15 years old, and they along with several older congregations are winning new people to Christ, but this only offsets the normal declines of the older churches. Thus the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town

will be staying the same. Finally, in Town-C, 30 of the churches are under 15 years old. In this town, the overall number of active Christian churchgoers will be on a path to grow 50% in a generation.

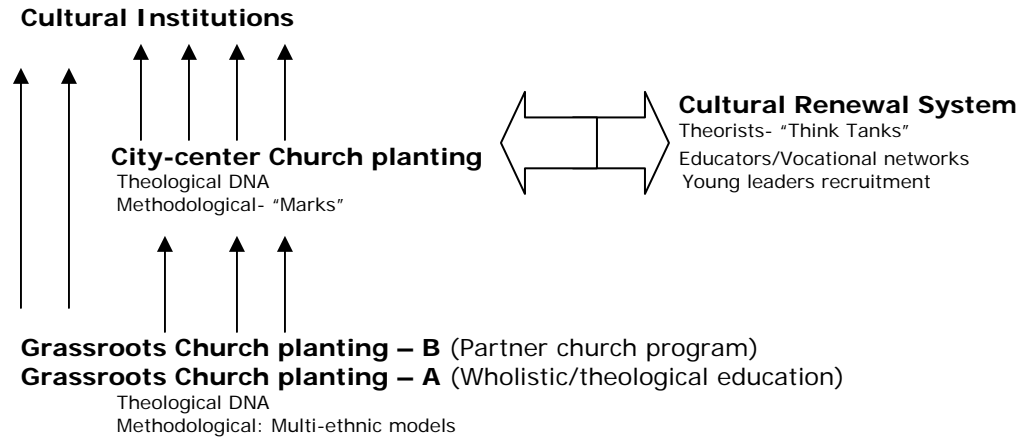
## 5. An understanding of how culture is formed and changes.

- “Top-down” aspect. Trends in culture flow mainly down from the most influential elite cultural institutions. Even if 80% of Americans are against something, if Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Hollywood, and the *New York Times* want some change in culture it is coming to us. Christians have very little presence in any top level institutions or venues--Christians are not writing and producing plays and major films, writing on the op-ed pages of the New York Times, leading the administrations of Ivy League schools, managing elite publications and research organizations.
- “Bottom up” aspect. Cultural change does not happen through either church growth or politics. Cultural change does happen when
  - A new culture is theorized and imagined by academics, thinkers, artists and
  - Counter-cultural communities (e.g. churches) of significant numbers, size, and ‘thickness’ in cultural centers and comprehensive networks in all fields (not just politics) adopt this new vision and live for the common good of and work for strategic change in cultural centers (major cities/university nexus).
- All major efforts by Christians to change society work on a different operating theory of how culture changes: e.g. defensive enclaves (conservative political), utopian enclaves (Anabaptist), world-view education only (colleges, educational programs), mainline alliance (liberal political), classic evangelistic (Crusade, etc). But cf. the impact of evangelicals who don’t live in cultural centers, ethnic groups who do but don’t work for the common good, and groups who do both.
- We said above that this is a historic moment for western cities. Christianity is growing in the grassroots of cities as never before. But if individuals come out of the first generation immigrant churches and just go to college and get jobs there will be little cultural change because: a) enormous pressure within society to seal off one’s faith from one’s work and b) cluelessness of churches to know how to help and support people in secular work. What do we need? They need the integration of faith-and-work 3-aspects and 3-component model of ministry described above (C.4.d) which operates based on this view of how culture is formed. Most of all they need to be in churches that are completely committed to this view of cultural change.

## 6. Understanding church models.

- The “Five Ministry Fronts” are not optional. We must do all these five because they are all required by the gospel. They are not optional. The grace-orientation of the gospel makes evangelistic worship and deep community both possible and necessary. The kingdom-orientation of the gospel makes wholistic ministry and the integration of faith and work imperative. Both grace and kingdom-mindedness provide the motivation for the hard work of church planting. But also, we do all these five because they are inter-dependent. Wholistic ministry, in which Christians work sacrificially for the common good, is the necessary context for any convincing evangelistic call to believe in Jesus. (Why should the people of the city listen to us if we are simply out to increase our own tribe and its power?) And culture cannot be changed simply through numerous conversions if Christians continue to ‘seal off’ their gospel-beliefs from how they work and live in public. Finally, church-planting is ultimately the only way to increase all these other ministries in the city. Only if we do all of these ministries at once will any of them be effective. They are inter-dependent and inter-locking.
- Having said this—we must recognize the impossibility of any one church being equally good at them all. There will be different ‘models’ of churches even of those who share the same theological DNA. Why? A) First, there is no promise that God will give any one church an equal distribution of gifts. Some churches simply attract more people with a concern for the poor than for the arts, and so on. B) Churches will be located in different places in the city-center. Some will be on the edge of a poor area, others near a center of one particular immigrant group, another in the very middle of the artistic community. The immediate context of the church will make it stronger in some of these areas. C) Also, the lead pastors are virtually never so multi-gifted that they are equally good at leading the church in each area. Large churches can staff to the pastor’s weakness, but that is not true of the smaller ones. So we must expect that a) on the one hand, every church will be better at two or three of these emphases and should capitalize and celebrate that, and yet b) they must always relentlessly work to keep strengthening their weaker ministry aspects. There is no other option for a city-center church. While many churches major exclusively in seeker orientation, or in wholistic ministry to the poor, or in cultural engagement, or in cell groups, or in church planting-- a center city all five of these emphases have to be kept together and combined. This is if you have the foundation of ‘depth proclamation of the gospel’.

## A MODEL OF CITY CHANGE



If (and only if) we produce *thousands* of new church-communities that regularly attract and engage secular people, that seek the common good of the whole city especially the poor, and that produce thousands of Christians who write plays, make movies, do creative journalism, begin effective and productive new businesses, use their money for others, and produce cutting-edge scholarship and literature--will see our vision for NYC realized and our whole society changed as a result.

## SUMMARY

Churches will be effective in city-centers that:

- Hold the historic Christian gospel--orthodox and Biblical in doctrine and practice, but are neither legalistic nor liberal, not doctrinalist nor pietist, not individualistic or collectivistic.
- Have a positive regard for the city; recognize that it is the most strategic possible place for ministry.
- Neither over or under adapt to the culture of those in their surrounding neighborhood and culture.
- Are intensely, creatively evangelistic and effective in reaching not just people who are already traditional or conservative but who are very secular.
- Relentlessly emphasize and seek to build strong, 'thick' counter-cultural Christian community in cities, especially through cell groups.
- Are wholistic, ministering in both word and deed to their community and the poor in extremely creative and generous ways.
- Have a bias toward being multi-ethnic--seek to be at least as multi-ethnic as their neighborhood.
- Are arts and culture-friendly; both supportive of Christian witness in 'secular work' and willing to train people for cultural leadership, not just church leadership
- See church planting as a ministry as natural and important as discipleship, music, education, and pastoral care.