

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMING OUR SOCIETY

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT - BIOETHICS, INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY, AND THE CHURCH IN POSTMODERN TIMES

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When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalms 11:3)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

The state of Christianity within the United States of America, as well as in the Western world, seems to be at a very confusing, yet interesting juncture. When poll after poll show that a vast majority of Americans claim to be Christian, and believe the Bible is the written word of God, it would seem logical that the Christian perspective or worldview would have a marked influence on the mainstream of American contemporary culture. “Polls report that as many as 94 percent of Americans believe in God, 80 percent claim to be Christians, and over 43 percent go to church every Sunday” (Veith, 1994, p.209). These type of statistics would seem to imply that American society should be somewhat morally healthy, yet the moral issues of the day appear to be under the control of a humanistic, secular revolution that decries acceptance of any religious opinions and practices, especially Christian beliefs, in the world’s marketplace of ideas.

It doesn’t take much effort from a Christian or faith-based viewpoint to recognize that American society is racing toward a cultural breakdown that could rival, or maybe exceed the immoral practices of Sodom and Gomorrah type societies. There are many critics of American culture and morality, though many of these same critics recognize that the United States is probably the only real superpower left in the world, and its form of government and civic order provide an enviable amount of protections, services, and freedoms for its citizens. For certain nations, liberty and freedom are just words, but for the Founding Fathers of the original thirteen colonies, and many who followed them, these words are a way of life that needs to be fought for and preserved.

America has traditionally prided itself as being a melting pot of ideas and cultures that thrive on independent thinking and self-directed motivations for the common good. Individualism has always been a part of the American way of life. Many believe America’s pluralism is one of its greatest strengths. However, this pluralism, or diversity, seems to be heading in a direction, or should I say in many confusing directions, that mirror an attitude of extreme autonomous living, which takes freedoms as “self” rights, instead of following the biblical mandates of loving our neighbors as ourselves and being our brother’s keeper. One only has to recognize the following freedoms that are currently deemed rights to recognize America’s shift in moral character: abortion on demand, claiming over 50 million preborn lives since 1973; doctor-assisted suicide, legal in the state of Oregon; easy access to pornography on the Internet; the practice of “alternative lifestyles”; and the acceptance of sexual permissiveness and violence in the nation’s media, schools and neighborhoods. America’s growing narcissistic approach to living should cause Christians to

seriously ponder the words in chapter five of Matthew's gospel that declare, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (v.13).

In 1992 Gerald R. McDermott captured the paradoxical dilemma surrounding the concept of American Christianity and its cultural influence in an article he wrote for the National and International Religion Report. He stated,

Evangelicals are frustrated because their attempts to transform American culture seem to have failed. After electing three presidents and sending hundreds of legislators to Washington, and despite influencing public policy with blizzards of mail and armies of lobbyists, evangelicals cannot point to a transformed America. As Charles Colson recently wrote in *Christianity Today*, "... religious influence has been so thoroughly scrubbed from public life that any honest observer would have to regard this as a post-Christian culture. Gallup reports the most bewildering paradox: religion up, morality down....We've protected our enterprises but in the process lost the culture."

Has the modern mindset, which looks to human reason as the world's problem solver taken over the American psyche by forcing the Christian perspective to stay within the four walls of its churches? Or, will the emerging postmodern way of thinking, which declares there are no absolutes, set the pace on how the nation deals with present and future scientific, social and moral issues?

In the early 1960's a particular discipline began to emerge, calling itself bioethics. In general, ethics plays two distinct roles: helping individuals to understand the way things are, and the way things ought to be. In other words, ethics distinguishes between good and bad, between right and wrong. When the prefix "bio" is added onto ethics the focus of its dual role centers on issues dealing with life, health and biotechnology.

Though the discipline of bioethics may have emerged during the middle of the 20th Century, the idea of bioethics or medical ethics is actually centuries old. It can be traced back to at least 400 B.C. when Hippocrates and the Hippocratic Oath set the standard ideal for medical care throughout Western civilization and the basis for modern-day health care. As medical science and technology continue to advance many new and wonderful possibilities to improve life and health are just on the verge of discovery, but at the same time there are questionable or problematic bioethical issues that many believe ought not to be allowed, even though technology and medical science can make them possible. Gilbert Meilaender in *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, emphasized that zealous opposition or resistance toward the forward momentum of scientific medicine is not the correct strategy one should take. Instead, Mr. Meilaender believes that

We must be prepared to acknowledge that there may be suffering we are free to end, but ought not, that there are children who might be produced through artificial means but ought not, that there is valuable knowledge that might be gained through use of unconsenting research subjects, but ought not (p. 5).

His ethical approach acknowledges the human desire for self-creation, but sees the need to limit human freedom, so that it doesn't strive to be godlike. A Christian understanding of the human condition called "sin" needs to be recognized in bioethics to help shape a proper moral vision that directs mankind to say "no" to some exercises of human freedom.

The field of bioethics initially allowed religious perspectives to challenge secular opinions in relation to the growing number of bioethical issues and dilemmas that the medical profession

found itself confronting. Regrettably, this tolerance for religious points of view was strategically phased out by those who espoused human reason and individual autonomy (i.e., self chosen plan or self rule) over spiritual inclinations when dealing with bioethical matters.

In fact, this marginalization of theological and religious perspectives had been accomplished by 1989, when the primary question of the Hastings Center symposium on “Religion and Bioethics” was, “What significance, if any, does [religion] hold for the ways we now do bioethics” (Rae and Cox, 1999, p.55).

Unfortunately, many individuals within the bioethics community, as well as other academic and scientific disciplines, do not understand that the human will is in bondage to sin. Left to ourselves, the choices we make will actually drive us away from God, not toward Him. When human beings begin to claim ultimate authority over themselves under the guise of noble intentions, there is a good chance horrific events will follow (e.g., French and Russian Revolutions). At its roots, true autonomy accepts no laws or norms that infringe on its self-affirming, greedy desire for unrestricted freedom. This desire for “self rule” has not only become the Holy Grail of bioethics and other cultural institutions, it has also crept into the Christian subculture where people of faith seem to reflect secular society. Many Christians appear to be choosing their religion as they do any other goods or services they decide upon in everyday life –What’s in it for me? Does it make me happy and fulfilled? When the truth of the Gospel is compromised to ensure that people’s egos are not bruised by so-called harsh, dogmatic doctrines, such as hell, redemption or conversion, it becomes quite clear why religious perspectives are becoming less influential in bioethics and the culture at large.

Though autonomy and human reason are defining features in what was called the “enlightenment” or modern age, a new era called postmodernism is claiming the death of modernism and replacing its old worldview with one that in effect denies all worldviews. A postmodernist believes that there are no absolutes between cultures. In essence, postmodernism has taken individual autonomy and replaced it with a bizarre form of cultural or group autonomy. In other words, postmodern reality is socially constructed by a variety of diverse communities that in and of themselves do not have a monopoly on truth, but within their own groups develop relative truths or rules that allow them to function. Multiculturalism is a major catalyst for postmodernism, facilitating the propagation of a moral relativism that creates the impression that all cultures think and act differently and that no one culture can claim absolute truth.

It is interesting to note that modernism or modernity sought to rid the world of religion by lifting up human reason and individual autonomy, whereas postmodernism does not rule out religion. In fact, postmodernism has a clear affinity for Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, because these religions teach that the external world is only an illusion made up by the human mind. Those who are taken up by postmodernism have taken individual autonomy, especially in religious expression, to a place of self worship.

New Age religions, for all of their pagan trappings, have in common the idea that the self is divine, that you are God, the creator of your own universe. As old as the Serpent’s lie to Eve (Genesis 3:5), this idea now finds its way into self-help books, motivational tracts, and pop psychology (“You create your own reality”)...For all of their differences, they will all assert the dogma that self is god, that the objective universe is an illusion, and that truth is relative” (Veith, 1994, p. 199).

In the meantime, the Christian cultural witness seems to be fighting against itself as the influences of modernism and the emerging postmodernism look to be taking over American culture. Regrettably, many Christians have adopted a dualistic worldview that somehow compartmentalizes or splits life into sacred and secular kingdoms.

Most Christians today identify the sacred solely with their personal and individual life, so that their faith has less and less to do with the culture “out there.” Christians have little influence in shaping culture because their world view precludes such an influence.... Unfortunately, Christians have been culture followers rather than culture formers (Walsh & Middleton, 1984, p. 100).

This dualism has somehow convinced many believers that our spiritual life can be separated from our cultural life, and living in secular environments without regard to transforming them is acceptable.

Christians who accept this dualistic worldview seem to fall into a spiritual “holy huddle” lifestyle, that subtly removes them from the Great Commission, and distorts their biblical interpretations of Scripture. Instead of seeing the biblical vision of heaven coming to earth, this type of Christian dualism promotes a world-flight mentality, causing believers to think Scripture is telling them to disengage themselves from a sinful world. For example, there is a growing, desperate desire within the Christian community for the Lord, before His return, to take believers out of creation during what is called the tribulation period. Any Scripture that even hints toward this form of eschatology is usually misread, and causes the focus of evangelism to be misdirected to individual or one-on-one type of witnessing only.

The point of view of focusing primarily on converting the individual rather than the system has been a major factor in the fading of Christian influence in all areas of American culture. While Christians are called to witness one-on-one to unbelievers, accepting the interpretation of “do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world...” (Romans 12:2) or similar Scriptures as commands from God to avoid transforming worldly institutions, such as the public school system or the entertainment industry, misses a fundamental aspect of evangelism. It is especially disconcerting to see the Christian perspective being ignored for the most part in the field of bioethics, because there is not a well-defined biblical strategy within the Christian community to engage secular bioethics.

New technology and scientific advances in medicine will be opening doors of opportunity with great hope of improving the health and welfare of humanity. Yet, the possibility of unimaginable evil also looms alongside man’s desire to advance science at the expense of redefining what it means to be human. The foundation of God’s Word, the gospel of Christ, needs to be a part of America’s ethical approach to issues that deal with life and health. Biblical virtues of love, meekness and humility need to take precedence, instead of reliance on a host of divisive and confusing modern and postmodern outlooks that have no consistent “absolutes” in ethical approaches to making decisions on complex moral issues.

A tidal wave of bioethical issues in genetic intervention, reproductive technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology is approaching, and will affect everyone on planet Earth. As we continue to move in the postmodern era, secular America will naturally move toward a selfish, utilitarian approach to bioethics, allowing the scientific community to take advantage of humanity at its most weak and vulnerable stages, unless the Church of Jesus Christ gets back into the culture. Within the Christian churches across America, numerous doctors, nurses, lawyers, educators,

scientists, pastors, priests, medical administrators and many other professionals are directly or indirectly involved in caring for the sick and dying, as well as a variety of other health care issues.

Unfortunately, many Christians feel helpless or indecisive about how to interject a biblical worldview into bioethics, especially pertaining to the four main secular bioethical principles: autonomy, non-maleficence [do no harm to others], beneficence [to help others] and justice [equals must be treated equally]. The major problem with these four secular principles is their propensity to act as moving targets, because secular bioethicists constantly adjust their worldview, believing there are always exceptions to the rules that form their particular ethical theory. To better understand how bioethics, autonomy, and the postmodern era can actually live together under a Christian perspective, the origins of the desire for autonomy needs to be traced.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language defines autonomy as the quality or condition of being autonomous; self-government. So, individual autonomy can be defined as either human self rule or human self law. The Bible teaches that neither nature, society, humanity, nor even the angelic hosts in heaven are truly autonomous, because all of them are utterly dependent on the sovereign will of God. "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The biblical narrative, as well as other historical writings, are full of examples of people seeking individual autonomy, even to the point of claiming divinity, and the tragic consequences of their actions. In fact, the doctrine of original sin is tied very closely to mankind's desire for individual autonomy. This yearning for "self rule" did not actually begin in the Garden of Eden, but was first birthed in heaven with Lucifer's fall, and is still being played out to this very day.

The disobedience of God's created beings concerning the issue of autonomy first occurred within the angelic hosts, who were in the very presence of God in heaven. The Book of Isaiah traces the five "I wills" of the fallen, powerful angel named Lucifer, whose free will revealed his pride and conceit and subsequent open rebellion against God. Lucifer or Satan's wish for an autonomous existence in heaven is still a mystery, but his desire for self rule, and his resultant fall is clearly chronicled in the pages of Old Testament Scripture,

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth... You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down... (Isaiah 14:12-15).

Satan's "I wills" are a shameful legacy, and as prince of this earth he is propagating an autonomous philosophy, which initially proclaims humanity as the master of its own destiny, and that ultimately leads mankind to recognize its own divinity. Satan began his deceptive work on earth by misleading Eve in the Garden of Eden by proclaiming, " 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened...' " (Genesis 3:5). In other words, Satan began to work on Eve's pride and conceit to convince her that she did not really need to be ruled by God, but should take control of her own destiny.

Again we see this autonomous lifestyle birthed by Satan's rebellion in the culture that built the tower of Babel. Confident in their human abilities, the Babelites began to say to one another, " 'Come, let's make bricks... Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth' " (Genesis 11:3,4). At first glance one might think that the Babelites were only using their technological prowess to improve their society, but God saw a growing desire in their hearts to reject Him and become masters of their own destiny.

God judged the pretensions of Babel. Noting their genuine accomplishments and the vast potential of human achievement, the Lord saw that a united, technologically sophisticated human race would be nearly unlimited in their capacity for evil...He shattered their self-deification and brought their famous tower to ruin (Veith, 1994, p.20).

As we fast forward from antiquity through the Middle Ages to modern times the principle of autonomy continues to influence society, as sinful human beings desire the liberty to be free from all restrictions and focus on things here and now, instead of some supernatural world to come. Just as the tower-builders in Babel, modernists are unified in an autonomous humanism that espouses human reason over everything else. "Reason alone...may now replace the reliance on the supernatural born out of the ignorance of 'unenlightened' times" (Veith, 1994, p.33). Scientific achievement in the 1700s accelerated at such a rapid pace that a profound shift occurred, placing science above Christian perspectives in explaining everything in our universe. Biblical miracles and revelation were deemphasized or excluded in favor of the power of human reason to tackle the issues of the day. Human reason, scientific discovery, and human autonomy became a new 'holy trinity' of Western civilization. The period known as the Enlightenment spread its gospel of rationalism to a world that had become disenchanted with the religious abuses of the Middle Ages.

The Enlightenment Period covered approximately 200 years of history, starting in the late 1700s and arguably ending in the late 20th Century. Enlightenment thinkers at first related moral absolutes to a supernatural God, but the basic truths of the Bible, such as salvation by grace, were set aside and replaced by a works-oriented faith. It didn't take long though, for the dangerous mix of human reason and autonomy to begin answering ethical questions in terms of closed systems, without regard to God's revelations about the world, the flesh and the devil. This approach to moral issues known as utilitarianism defined the worth and value of anything by its utility.

Utilitarians decide moral issues, not appealing to transcendent absolutes, but by studying the effect of an action upon the system. Stealing is wrong, not because the Ten Commandments say so, but because stealing interferes with the economic functioning of society. Something is good if it makes the system run more smoothly. Something is evil if it interferes with the cogs of a vast machine. Practicality becomes the sole moral criterion. If it works, it must be good (Veith, 1994, p.33-34).

Also birthed during the Age of Enlightenment were a number of counter movements that acted as catalysts for a later movement called postmodernism, which many in academic circles today believe has already put an end to modernism. Romanticism and existentialism were the two rebel ideas that emerged out of the Enlightenment Period as anti-modern. The romantic saw nature as a living organism, not a vast machine, where God was not detached from His creation, but intimately involved with it. It may not have been God of the Bible, but romanticism believed in the existence of deity, even to the point of God being identical to nature and to the self. The existentialist brought to full bloom the idea of moral relativism, in which every meaning is valid. For example, all religions are valid, because individuals inhabit their own private reality of the divine, and since they are private matters, they cannot be imposed on anyone else. "I'm OK, you're OK," and "What's true for me may not be true for you," are statements that define the anti-modern movement.

As science and technology continued to advance at exponential rates after World War II and into the mid 20th Century, a host of challenging and mind boggling moral issues began to emerge,

especially in medicine and medical technology, under the influences of modernism and postmodernism. Many of these important moral issues fell into the new discipline of bioethics, where guiding principles were less influenced by biblical truth, and more by autonomous humanism and moral relativism, mostly following individual human reason, emotions, and autonomy with no firm foundations.

Major bioethical issues found themselves being shifted toward public policy during the end of the so-called modern era (i.e., mid 1900s) and during the emergence of postmodernism (i.e., late 1900s). This shift inevitably results in the establishing of a lowest-common-denominator ethic, capable of securing public consensus. The avoidance of consistent “absolutes” in ethical approaches to complex moral issues leaves the secular viewpoint lacking insight and finality to many problems facing the world today. Instead of human reason and autonomy providing a solid moral vision, the secular viewpoint fosters many divisive and confusing outlooks. As American culture increasingly comes under the influence of postmodernism, the celebration of individual autonomy over religious as well as political authority could be replaced by a mindset that indiscriminately accepts anything and everything, producing a nation more morally adrift than it is now.

It is obvious that American Christians need to be more proactive outside its church walls, if they are to take part in significantly transforming contemporary culture. Though Christianity survived the modern era, there is still the tendency to change the character and teaching of the church to make it more appealing to contemporary culture in these postmodern times. As the two kingdoms of secular and sacred clash under the influences of modernism and a new, emerging postmodernism, believers need to understand what the essence of the Church really means and what it should do. Once this understanding is captured and put into practice, believers can become an effective change agent for present and future bioethical moral issues. Also, Christians can use postmodernism to their advantage, while confronting humanity’s desire to follow Satan’s will to be like the most high God.

The Christian Church is both a social organization and a spiritual community. Though this duality is inherent in the Church’s nature, it is frequently misunderstood by many within the Body of Christ.

Most Christians in North America have a distorted picture of church. We have a distorted understanding of the church’s nature—its unique character as a community of God’s people. We also have a distorted understanding of the church’s ministry—its full expression of living as a community under God’s reign. And we have a distorted understanding of the church’s organization—how it is to structure itself to carry out its ministry consistent with its nature (Van Gelder, 2000, p.25).

A common mistake Christians make is in trying to compartmentalize the Church’s nature, ministry and organization, not seeing them as a whole, complementing each other, in order that the redemptive work of Jesus Christ under the Holy Spirit’s power can be accomplished by God’s people.

The church is missionary by nature, and should not be confused with the function of a missions ministry.

Just as God is a missionary God, so the church is to be a missionary church. It is to live fully within the active, redemptive, kingdom reign of God in the world as it is led and taught by the Spirit. It is to be a new community that expresses both the intent of the creation

design and the aspirations of re-creation as it anticipates the new heavens and new earth (Van Gelder, 2000, p.98).

In other words, all members of the church are to be missionaries, conveying the Good News to others no matter where they work, live or play. They are not to be passive about their faith in Christ, and need to understand that God requires each and every Christian to follow the example of Christ and acknowledge that the redemptive reign of God is leading the church into a dynamic battle with the forces of evil. The missionary nature created by the Spirit of God is the essence of the Christian Church, rejecting timidity and encouraging boldness by its followers to invite the world to watch, listen, examine and consider accepting the reign of God in their lives. This boldness is not arrogance that demeans and intimidates. It is actually having the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), which allows believers to imitate Christ, especially His love and humility, to attract those floundering in sin and confusion. A key attribute that will open great opportunities for evangelism within the existing Christian subculture will be this humility, securely embedded in the church's day-to-day interactions with the community of saints and the secular world.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4).

This approach may seem foreign to many Christians, because they have misunderstood the true nature and mission of the Church, but it will create numerous opportunities to attract those who are adrift in postmodernism.

Postmodernism is marked by its rejection of moral "absolutes" and the phenomenon of different groups and their worldviews splintering off into their own subcultures. Modernism for the most part tried to keep religious beliefs from entering and influencing the public realm, while postmodernism is more accepting of public displays of religious belief, as long as they do not monopolize or claim absolute truth over other forms of religious expression within the various subcultures. This aspect of postmodernism may play well into a Christian strategy to reach the lost, who are caught up in a postmodern lifestyle.

Christians in general have actually bought into the postmodern idea of creating different subcultures. Believers today have their own media, bookstores, entertainment industry, colleges, schools, as well as a home school network that is both national and local. There are, of course, critics to this subculture within the Christian community, but before believers reject a Christian subculture they need to realize that the alternative may be cultural extinction.

As mentioned earlier, Christianity has been marginalized or deemed ineffective by the culture at large. The Christian subculture needs to be recognized as a great achievement and, dare I say, is influenced by the Holy Spirit, in an age when people worship diversity for all the wrong reasons. The Lord commands Christians to be shrewd when dealing with a sin-filled world. Jesus told his disciples, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16, NIV). This command will be fulfilled in the Christian subculture if the Church wakes up and sees what the Body of Christ is supposed to be doing in a fallen world. First and foremost, the Christian subculture is not an avenue where believers can experience a comfortable Christian lifestyle, devoid of conflict, suffering and

sacrifice. In essence, the evangelical subculture should not resemble what secular postmodernism has to offer. It should provide counter institutions already in place, to be a resistive force against anti-modernism, as well as a safe haven for those seeking biblical truth. “Christians should use their bases to make forays into the culture at large and exert their influence at every level. They should certainly resist the temptation to remain in the security of the ‘Christian ghetto’ ” (Veith, 2000, p. 210).

Where Christian ideas and influences have waned during the modern era, the postmodern period may allow a biblical perspective to infiltrate into the culture where the barriers of human reason and autonomy have been a constant force in pushing back religious viewpoints. For example in the area of bioethics, there may be many Pauline experiences, such as his “Mars Hill” encounter with the men of Athens (i.e., Acts 17:16-34), that can be relived in today’s culture, allowing biblical truth to be demonstrated through a variety of different directions that initially do not need the stamp of Christian theology upon them, but in the end doesn’t shy away from the true Gospel. This initial approach for bioethics was best presented by Scott Rae and Paul Cox in *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age*. The authors made the statement:

Doing Christian bioethics in a secular society involves thorough grounding in the theological notions underlying bioethics, but articulating those positions in ways that are not solely dependent on one’s theology. Scripture itself opens the door to such approach, and the public policy institutions generally demand that religiously grounded views be presented with publicly accessible reasons (p.293).

Some within Christian circles could see this approach as watering down the gospel for the sake of contemporary culture. However, if the Church takes the time to understand the postmodern mindset, and to engage the world from its own Christian subculture, direct and indirect approaches of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ can be accomplished, and a greater godly influence into contemporary culture can be achieved.

Influencing the postmodern generation can also be accomplished by promoting the assortment of ethnic cultures that make up the Body of Christ in conjunction with the postmodernist’s skewed view of diversity. Postmodernism at its heart rejects objective truth, yet celebrates the customs, religions and ethics of all people as equal. The Church community includes people of diverse racial, political and national identities. This diversity needs to be lived visibly in the world, displaying a corporate, international family of God that is truly from “every tribe and tongue” (Matthew 28:19 and Revelation 5:9,10). The Christian Church is to live as a unified community in sacrificial love and fellowship. “The church is not a collection of self-selected individuals who assemble to have their needs met. The church, as the creation of the Spirit, corporately offers salvation to individuals, but this salvation is accepted and experienced within a community” (Van Gelder, 2000, p.131). The ministry of the church grows out of the missionary heart of God that is willing to reclaim ground lost to modernism, and accepting suffering and pain as a part of the privilege of redeemed living in postmodern times.

In the Book of Psalms a question is asked of the reader: “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalms 11:3) I think the answer to the question can be found in the Book of Romans: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). The Church needs to be

countercultural, conveying an image to the masses in these postmodern times that the Body of Christ resembles Pentecost more than Babel.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit began gathering the Church of all nations (Acts 2:41). This Church was a different kind of community, neither unified in an autonomous humanism like the Tower-builders and the modernists, nor fractured into alien groups like the Babelites and the postmodernists. Rather, the Church is a balance of both unity and diversity, a single Body consisting of organs as different from each other as a foot and an eye (1 Corinthians 12), but unified in love for each other and faith in Jesus Christ (Veith, 1994, p.22).

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