

Appendix A

Real churches multiply in a post-modern culture

With the DNA of multiplication in mind (Death, New Wineskins, and Apprentices; see Chapter 1), let's sync with a postmodern culture that is largely disinterested in church. *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, defines *postmodern*: "a catchall phrase to name our time and our place in the West, especially the impulse to do things differently" (Vanhoozer 2005, 600). Postmodernism is a slippery beast in murky water. It resists description like a teenager who does not want to be categorized by his parents.

Postmoderns resist the modern world's reliance on "meta-narratives" like science, communism, capitalism, or Christianity. Leonard Sweet takes a stab at this slippery beast in his books *Post-Modern Pilgrims* and *The Gospel According to Starbucks* with the acronym EPIC. Here I will describe EPIC and contrast it with a my own summary of modernism, the acronym ROAR.

Postmoderns are "Experience-based." The modernist relies upon human "Reason"—proof is by the scientific method, truth is based on wisdom, certainty comes by consensus among the experts. Master's degrees are required because modernity seeks to master things. Rather than collecting more things, postmoderns collect experiences, like trips to California or Monte Carlo, in the "experience economy." More than proving God's existence, experiencing God is the quest of the postmodern.

The DNA of multiplication in a postmodern world is blocked when we do not die to the old wineskins of centralized hierarchies and leaders who do it all. The DNA of preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus, creating decentralized networks of likeminded leaders, and churches that work together to multiply ministry through training apprentice leaders, fits the postmodern world. One excellent example of this is Christ Community Church, led by Tom Nelson, where they have the Razor's Edge ministry to train apprentices and develop young pastors (see <http://www.ccefc.org/leam/razors>).

Churches that preach Christ crucified, network with other Christians, and commit to train apprentice-disciples experience his resurrection power in a postmodern city. Our daughter lives in

Washington, D.C., and loves National Community Church (<http://theaterchurch.com>), where Mark Batterson is senior pastor for thousands of postmoderns. In his book *The Circle Maker*, he calls for seeking the Lord in prayer and fasting that obeys the Risen Christ and that results in his manifest presence. “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21).

Postmoderns are “Participatory.” The modernist relies on “Observation” in a laboratory, a library, or a large church. Postmoderns seek participation. Old-wineskin churches in America are successful with Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night Bible teaching. Today, postmoderns seek a church that participates in the community with service projects, in missions with short-term trips, and with people in small groups. The modern church creates spectators while the postmodern church draws participants through making disciples and training leaders. “Incarnation” and “missional” are words used to describe these new wineskins.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch describe the famous missional church.

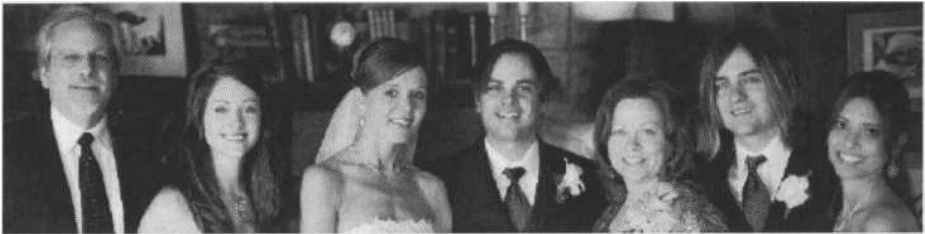
Conventional churches that make worship the organizing principle usually see evangelism, for example, as the recruiting of new people to attend worship and other organization-based services. They see Christian fellowship as the building up of the worshipping community. Missional churches understand community is best built in those in league with each other in the creative task of mission. (Frost and Hirsch 2008,181) (More on this in Chapter 3 on innovation.)

Postmoderns are “Image-driven.” The modern world learns “Absolute Truth” from statistics, scientists, and experts. Postmoderns seek reality in images, especially in articles, shows, movies, and Facebook friends. Modernists emphasize scientific formulas; postmoderns emphasize trusted friends.

Postmoderns like to make God in their own image. One postmodern who heard that Jesus had risen from the dead asked if he was a zombie. Some think he is the first feminist, or the shaman of shamans, or a revolutionary. The real Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not be afraid,”

and to the one who doubted most, “It is me. Look at my hands and my feet.” When we see the real Jesus in Scripture, we know he is not a ghost or our good idea; he is the only begotten Son of God.

I can show you a picture of our family that was taken in Boone, North Carolina, at the wedding of our oldest son, David, and his beautiful bride Beth.



With this image in your mind, you would recognize us if we came to your door. Prophecies in the Old Testament were images of the coming King of Kings so that we might recognize God’s Messiah when he came as Mary’s little lamb. One creative new approach to presenting the biblical images of Jesus is *The Story* by Zondervan. On a Sunday in 2012, I worshiped with a church using *The Story*. We saw a five-minute video on the life of Solomon that used stick figures, and the pastor preached on the legacy of Solomon. Everyone connected with the images that pointed us to see Jesus for who he really is.

Postmoderns are “Community-driven.” The modern world is driven by individual “Responsibility.” Postmoderns grew up in a world where boomers were responsible at work, but too often hypocrites at home. The children of divorce do not believe that responsibility is king. Their real world consists of friends, Facebook, and the “urban tribe” where they find fulfilling relationships. The phrase “urban tribe” describes twentysomethings who work in a big city and survive by connecting to a group of twelve to twenty other people just like them. They go to the same restaurants. They help each other move. They go to the same party on Friday night. While moderns can live in front of a TV, postmoderns connect to their tribe in the urban jungles of society.

When community is king, what are the implications for the church? Larry Osborne, senior pastor of North Coast Church said “Our goal is that one of a person’s three best friends are in the church.” They seek to Velcro people to each other in the church. Their most effective method is the sermon-textbased small group. For over twenty years, 80% of the adults have found community in a North Coast Life Group.

Our goal must be to connect people to one another in the local church through any number of effective approaches: one-on-one mentoring experiences, Life Groups, and other forms of discipleship groups that provide real experiences, real participation, and real connectivity. This connectivity must also be with the city where we live.

“Missional Communities” are now more than a concept. Churches are starting around the globe with missional communities as the core strategy. One definition is “A group of anything from twenty to more than fifty people who are united, through Christian community, around a common service and witness to a particular neighborhood or network of relationships” (Breen 2010, 18). My wife Jan and I spent a sabbatical in Brazil with our son Derick and his Brazilian wife Michelle. The youth pastor who performed their marriage there is now starting a church in the capital city by multiplying missional communities. Edwardo and his wife took two years forming the first missional community to serve a group of urban poor (the trash collectors). Now, in the third year, they will be expanding. Sounds a little like Jesus and the apostles!

The post-resurrection appearances of Christ are EPIC! What greater thrill is there than to experience the Risen Christ? What greater participation is there than to touch his wounds? There is no greater image than Jesus who is himself the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus connects with Mary in the Garden, finds Peter who denied him, appears suddenly in the room where they are huddled in fear, comes back to restore doubting Thomas, bums the hearts on the Road to Emmaus, and makes breakfast on a beach for his disciples who had gone fishing, so they could share table fellowship.

While modernism roars, postmodernism is epic: Experience over reason, participation over observation, image over absolutes, and connectivity over individualistic responsibility. Jesus can ROAR and Jesus is EPIC! Just as genuine Christianity thrives in a modern world, it also will thrive in a postmodern world because we can Experience his presence, we can Participate in his body, we know the Icon of the invisible God, and the church is the connective Community we all seek!