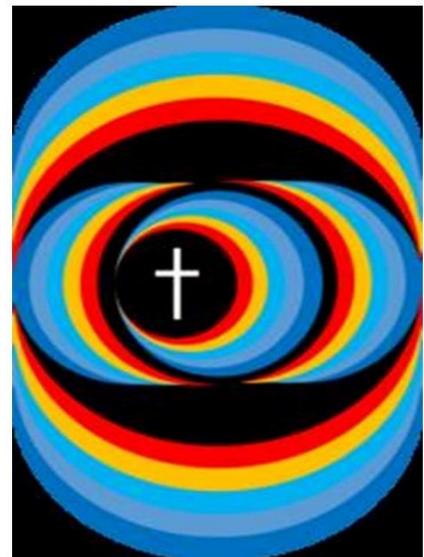


# The Inside Out Church:

## MOVING TOWARDS A disciple-MISSIONAL MODEL

The Inside Out Church is a church that balances the inside with the outside. What does that mean – balancing the inside with the outside? It is well understood that a church is a gathering of peoples who share the same faith, in the same God, and potentially share the same worldview. The church consists of people who gather inside a building, but who live outside of that building – they gather to worship Jesus Christ, but they scatter to live, work, and play in the world out there.

The Inside Out church seeks to give clarity to how and why we live, work, play, and worship the way we do. The pages you are about to read are a chapter excerpted from the full Doctoral Project book as written by Dale Melenberg. The first two chapters (3&4) utilized for this Study are chosen to reveal the worldly influences on our lives, in and out of the church. The next two chapters (5&6) will reveal the biblical impetus for how we are live our lives, in and out of the church.



Since these excerpts are taken directly out of the completed Doctoral Project, please know they are written to satisfy the academic standards for which they were intended. These chapter excerpts are supplementary to the Sermon Study Series and are not compulsory for reading before or after each study session. They are provided as additional resource only.

## CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL FORCES

The challenge facing the CRC in Canada comes from both within and without. The shifting culture in Canada, North America, nay . . . the world, continually presents the Church with pressures to adapt, adopt, or resist. The Church must decide. The Western culture of the world is fast moving from values well established in modernity to embracing new values prompted by postmodernity, effectively watering down Christianity. The CRC in Canada, with its *ethos* steeped in Reformed history, where theology, doctrines, and liturgies are held in high regard, are facing challenges to regain relevance within the current culture, with even its own members. The CRC in Canada has become isolated, insulated, inauthentic, and unwilling to change, but change it must. The CRC in Canada needs to examine its roots and determine if the challenge arises from within or without, or both. The following theological reflections on culture will illustrate the context in which the church seeks to thrive.

### **Cultural Forces that Conflict with Faith**

#### Modernity and Postmodernity

Colin Greene and Martin Robinson boldly proclaim that “Christendom is dead – we have only yet to arrange the funeral. To a progressively non-churchgoing population in [Canada], Christendom has ceased to exist. The challenge for the Christian church in the Twenty-First Century is how to completely re-imagine itself.”<sup>1</sup> Greene and Robinson make this statement in response to the state of the culture in the Westernized nations of the world. The Church, formed through the past four hundred years of modernity now faces a culture shifting into a postmodern world. Cultures are changing and adapting to the postmodern influences, as perhaps they should; the definition of culture by Paul Ricoeur states: “Cultures are already preconfigured, configured, and reconfigured in the narratives and stories that express their corporate intentionality.”<sup>2</sup> It is in this shifting and adapting milieu that the Church finds themselves. Greene and Robinson, however, promote a “radical and subversive cultural engagement” for the church, an engagement that confronts the culture.<sup>3</sup> The flow of narratives and stories that have configured modernity and postmodernity are reviewed in the hopes of discovering a means for the Church to engage, and perhaps, revive Christendom.

Modernity, the age of Western civilization from the 1700s to the 1900s, could be described as the age of economics, politics, and science. Indeed, this age brought finances, information, and technology on a grand global scale. The benefits to the Western citizen were the ability to create wealth

on an individual basis, democratic freedoms, and innovation and interconnectivity. Nietzsche observed that “the will to power still resides at the heart of the modernity story and it still remains wedded to an erroneous philosophy of individualistic, [and] aggressive subjectivity.”<sup>4</sup> Western civilization had become an imperialistic society that matched the Roman Empire aspirations of power and wealth.

All was not well within Western Civilization though, for with wealth, power, and reason comes new narratives and stories. Hierarchies, abuse, and domination began to be the themes of the Western world. Capitalistic modernity, as quoted by Greene and Robinson, is a “self-reproducing and stabilizing system of commodity production and exploitation under the domination of capital.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the separation of church and state, both entities relied on each other to gain the power and wealth they both wanted. Christendom maintained its hold on all things religious, and the state held all things economic and political, but the two had used each other for their own self-serving benefit. Meanwhile the individual was left to create and amass wealth and to decide for themselves what they deemed proper, or for that matter, improper. Individualism was on the rise. Modernity’s aggressive philosophy of subjectivity wedded to political and economic opportunism is what post moderns have tried most systematically to eradicate. Ray Anderson says that “Postmodernity may well be – at the very least – a healthy correction to the excessively abstract and universalizing tendency of the post-Enlightenment period in Europe.”<sup>6</sup> Western society and its influence grew, globalization was fast becoming a reality in the twenty-first century, and with it, the transition to postmodernity.

Postmodernity is the catch phrase describing contemporary twenty-first century Western culture, postmodernity as in occurring after modernity. “Postmodernism is a complicated term, hard to define, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. It is hard to locate it temporally or historically, because it is not clear exactly when postmodernism begins.” However, Mary Klages finds it helpful to note the basis for modernity before attempting to describe postmodernity.<sup>7</sup>

Modernity is fundamentally about order: about rationality and rationalization, creating order out of chaos. The assumption is that creating more rationality is conducive to creating more order, and the more ordered a society is, the better it will function (the more rationally it will function). Because modernity is about the pursuit of ever-increasing levels of order, modern societies constantly are on guard against anything and everything labeled as “disorder,” which would disrupt order. Thus modern societies rely on continually establishing a binary opposition between “order” and “disorder,” so that they can assert the superiority of “order.” But to do this,

they have to have things that represent “disorder” – modern societies thus continually have to create/construct “disorder.” In western culture, this disorder becomes “the other” – defined in relationship to other binary oppositions. Thus anything non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-hygienic, non-rational, (etc.) becomes part of the “disorder,” and has to be eliminated from the ordered, rational modern society.

Louis Hoffman agrees, he says, that modernity is based upon the principles of Newtonian physics and a belief in an objective, knowable truth. Postmodernism is built off the principles of the new sciences including quantum physics and chaos theory which maintain a skepticism about objective truth and our ability to know it.”<sup>8</sup> Modernity is therefore reliant upon a grand narrative that tells the story of superiority of order over disorder.

Postmodernity, on the other hand, is a critique of grand narratives. Postmodernity, in rejecting grand narratives, favors “mini-narratives,” stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern “mini-narratives” are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability. This postmodern perspective influences how one looks at knowledge and the acquisition thereof. Klages, again ...

In modern societies, knowledge was equated with science, and was contrasted to narrative; science was good knowledge, and narrative was bad, primitive, irrational (and thus associated with women, children, primitives, and insane peoples). Knowledge, however, was good for its own sake; one gained knowledge, via education, in order to be knowledgeable in general, to become an educated person. In a postmodern society, however, knowledge becomes functional – you learn things, not to know them, but to use that knowledge. ... educational policy today puts an emphasis on skills and training, rather than on a vague humanist ideal of education in general.<sup>9</sup>

Not only is knowledge in postmodern societies characterized by its utility, but knowledge is also distributed, stored, and arranged differently in postmodern societies than in modern ones. The advent of electronic computer technologies has revolutionized the modes of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption in our society. In postmodern societies, anything which is not able to be translated into a form recognizable and storable by a computer will cease to be knowledge. In this paradigm, the opposite of knowledge is not ignorance (as in modern paradigms), but it becomes considered “noise.” Any thing that doesn’t qualify as a kind of knowledge is “noise.” The ongoing debate among

postmodernity is the question of who decides what knowledge is (and what “noise” is), and who knows what needs to be decided.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps postmodernity is a complicated term, hard to define, because within itself it is still questioning its own grand narrative without naming it as a grand narrative. These aspects of postmodernity, its critique of grand narratives, its preference for fragmentation, and yet its profound desire to put knowledge to use, is a cultural force that threatens the Church with her grand narrative, her desire for unification, and her antiquated methods of knowledge. The tension felt here provides the basis which illuminates the way forward for the Church.<sup>11</sup>

Narrowing the focus from the larger scale, and attempting to highlight postmodernity’s impact on the Church, Greene and Robinson provide their own critique. Where Modernity could be described as containing Christendom and colonial traits as well as secular and individualistic traits, postmodernity does not. If anything, postmodernity seeks to remove those labels from society all together. Postmodernity is described through various lenses by Greene and Robinson. The four lenses they name are post-Christendom, post-Secular, post-Colonial, and post-Individual, elaborated on as follows:

### **Post-Christendom**

The separation of church and state created fertile ground on which to let Christendom decay. The problem occurred by the end of the nineteenth century when modernity no longer required its religious legitimation. The Church holding on to its last vestiges of influence was relegated to a corner of society. Its power and influence finally eroded by scandal and distrust, the population looked elsewhere for moral guidance. Greene and Robinson write, “In the twentieth century, after two world wars and the horrors of the holocaust, Christendom ran out of steam.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Post-Secular**

Globalization has propagated worldviews so much so that a diversity of opinion on matters of faith now abound, all influencing the Western mind. Greene and Robinson quip, “There are no isolated worldviews in the twenty-first century, only ways of being and living in an increasingly global urban village that just happens to be the way we do things around here and we are glad you do it differently!”<sup>13</sup> The acceptance and proliferation of worldviews in opposition to Christendom nicely allies itself with the secular mindset. However, Greene and Robinson point out, “The collapse of Christendom was supposed to announce the victory of something called secularization ... but secularization is showing some considerable signs of ill health.”<sup>14</sup> This reality suggests that religion might be more resilient and adaptable to cultural trends than first thought.

## **Post-Colonial**

The sixteenth century introduced colonialism into the Western mind-set when European nations began their great conquests. Post-colonialism, however, is a relatively new phenomenon and a working definition could be simply that it is characterized by substantial economic, political, social, religious, and humanitarian challenges and changes following the end of the colonial era. The legacy of colonialism is often seen as the direct consequence of the inequalities engendered by modernity . . . hence, postmodernity seeks to right the wrongs. The global reality is now a more startlingly pluralist smorgasbord of cultural possibilities than we could ever previously imagined.<sup>15</sup> The move from colonialization to globalization brings with it new stories and voices, and new cultural horizons are coming into view.

## **Post-Individualism**

The individual ego or subject has stood at the centre of philosophical debate concerning human identity ever since the Enlightenment. However, it is collapsing under the burden of far too much philosophical freight, according to Greene and Robinson. With the advent of postmodernity this philosophy of subjectivity and the valorization of the individual human ego or subject has died the death of a thousand qualifications. The ideality of the self-conscious “I am” is already deconstructed by the fact that the “I am” has been named and therefore superseded by what Wittgenstein referred to as the linguistic limits of our world. The result of all this post-individualism is that there is a desperate need to locate theology and philosophy of human subjectivity that will help us rediscover ourselves as another, rather than competitive, isolated, alienated, individual subjects.<sup>16</sup>

These four lenses are helpful in identifying the current cultural milieu that Greene and Robinson call the *metavista*. Although Phyllis Tickle in her book, *Emergence Christianity*, states that “all these ‘posts’ and another half-dozen like them are descriptions by subtraction rather than by addition.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, both modernity and postmodernity are still alive and well. Hoffman states it this way, “There is something about postmodernism that people are resonating with, even if only at an unconscious level. However, we can still see modernism abounding in large scale dominance in much of culture, too.”<sup>18</sup> The vestiges of modernity are not gone or relinquished by all, and neither is postmodernity embraced by all, and yet the church must seek to radically engage in this cultural milieu. Or in the words of Greene and Robinson, “This *metavista* world awaits the invention of a new mission-ecclesiological narrative of faith, hope, and love that will provide the church with some genuinely new socio-political capital.”<sup>19</sup>

## Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

While *Metavista* points out the major cultural movements in North American society, Kenda Creasy Dean narrows the focus onto what the spiritual/religious implications are because of the effects of postmodernity. In her book, *Almost Christian*, Dean describes the current condition of society in order to postulate her supposition that a Christian education is needed that is deeply rooted in missional activity in order to reverse the trend of North American teenagers leaving the church.<sup>20</sup> She picks up on the seminal work of Smith and Denton in their published research entitled, *Soul Searching*, which describes the contemporary spiritual/religious outlook of North American life. Smith and Denton refer to a pervasive erosion of Christian values by what they term, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. It is through this “movement” in society that Dean describes how the current cultural values and thought have pervaded churches, their teachings, and their members. This MTD pervasion is what is felt within Canadian culture, more than what seems possible to contend with.<sup>21</sup> An in-depth look at the narrative that Dean describes as MTD follows.

Dean’s question is “How can the twenty-first century church better prepare young people steeped in Moralistic Therapeutic Deism for the trust-walk of Christian faith?”<sup>22</sup> MTD is “a hodgepodge of banal, self-serving, feel-good beliefs [that] yields a default spirituality that bears little resemblance to the historic teachings of Christianity.”<sup>23</sup> How did the teenagers in fact learn this belief structure: both Dean, and Smith and Denton, place the responsibility squarely on the parents. “Teenagers are a reflection of their parents’ religious devotion.” says Dean.<sup>24</sup> It “is the routine failure of adults to recognize the responsibility of their own adult world,” says Smith and Denton.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, what is seen in the teenagers is nothing but a reflection of their parents, and with that the society as a whole.

So what exactly MTD is and how it plays out in the lives of North Americans is important to understand. Dean, quoting Smith and Denton directly, lists the guiding beliefs of MTD in five points, as noted in their list, Figure One.<sup>26</sup>

1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Quoting Smith and Denton further, Dean says that MTD seems to be “colonizing many historical religious traditions and, almost without anyone noticing, converting believers in the old faiths to its alternative religious vision of divinely underwritten personal happiness and inter-personal niceness. . . . Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in the United States.”<sup>27</sup> And it could be said that with the more secular nature of Canada that this aptly describes the religious/spiritual outlook and values of Canadian society.<sup>28</sup>

MTD devotees espouse non-judgmental openness, self-determination, and the authority of personal experience. And sadly enough, they profess this and practice this because this is what the Church has taught them.<sup>29</sup> It is a low commitment religion, and they wonder out loud, “Isn’t being good enough, good enough?”<sup>30</sup> MTD may well be, according to Smith and Denton, “the new mainstream American religious faith for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalistic society.”<sup>31</sup>

Everything that Klages, Hoffman, Tickle, and Greene and Robinson have portrayed about current contemporary outlooks, and all that Dean, supported by Smith and Denton, have postulated about the current cultural situation has illustrated a society that has thoroughly watered down Christianity, and is still in need of a direction. Smith and Denton identify that individual psychological issues, moral character, smart or poor choices, and behaviors are often powerfully shaped by the social and cultural forces of therapeutic individualism, mass consumer capitalism, the digital communication revolution, residual positivism and empiricism, the structural disconnect, and other relevant cultural and social contradictions and tensions. They go on to say that these big picture social influences and organizing structures are objectively, structurally, institutionally, and culturally forming contemporary lives.<sup>32</sup> And so they conclude that it will require intentionality and investment in order to counter the effects of MTD on our society, our culture, and its peoples. The Church must look upon itself to see how it has sought to respond to culture, and how it seeks to maintain its faith and its practices.

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- <sup>1</sup> Colin Greene and Martin Robinson, *Metavista: Bible, Church, and Mission in an Age of Imagination* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic, 2008) 70.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.
- <sup>4</sup> Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 24.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 9.
- <sup>7</sup> Mary Klages, *Postmodernism*, [www.colorado.edu/English2012Klagedpomo.html](http://www.colorado.edu/English2012Klagedpomo.html), ([www.bdavetian.com/Postmodernism.html](http://www.bdavetian.com/Postmodernism.html)) accessed March 9, 2106.
- <sup>8</sup> Louis Hoffman, *Differentiations Between Postmodern Culture and Postmodern Theory* ([http://www.postmodernpsychology.com/main\\_topics/culture\\_and\\_theory.htm](http://www.postmodernpsychology.com/main_topics/culture_and_theory.htm)) accessed March 9, 2016.
- <sup>9</sup> Klages, *Postmodernity*.
- <sup>10</sup> Klages, *Postmodernity*.
- <sup>11</sup> Appendix A provides a further look at the comparisons of modernity to postmodernity, by naming the contrasting tendencies each movement displays.
- <sup>12</sup> Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 69,70.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>15</sup> Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 78, 79, 83.
- <sup>16</sup> Greene and Robinson, *Metavista*, 84, 85.
- <sup>17</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 129.
- <sup>18</sup> Hoffman, *Differentiating Between Postmodern Culture and Postmodern Theory*.
- <sup>19</sup> Greene & Robinson, *Metavista*, 88.
- <sup>20</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 22.
- <sup>21</sup> A recent survey conducted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada discovered the same findings as that postulated by both Smith and Denton, as well as by Dean. This Canadian research was published as *Hemorrhaging Faith* and is listed in the bibliography for further reference.
- <sup>22</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 22.
- <sup>23</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, book cover description.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 264.
- <sup>26</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.
- <sup>27</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.
- <sup>28</sup> The cultural milieu of plurality and diversity in Canada was described earlier in Chapter 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 28,29.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 39.
- <sup>31</sup> Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 262.
- <sup>32</sup> Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 263.