

APPENDIX 1-E

LECTURE NUMBER FIVE: THE CHURCH AND POSTMODERNITY

Lecture Number Five Outline

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I. Notes

A “PowerPoint” presentation accompanies this lecture. It functions much like that of the presentation in the previous lecture (more word-oriented) and similarly serves to underscore main points (especially those of section VI, Observations and Recommendations).

II. Lecture Goal

The goal of the lecture will be to make observations and recommendations on how the church may adapt to engage and minister to postmodern culture more effectively.

II.A. Objective

We will look at the biblical perspective/definition of the church so students may compare how our present understanding supports or undermines it. This will lay a foundation for making the observations and recommendations.

III. Opening Prayer

“Lord of the Church, we thank you that you have chosen us to be your bride, as imperfect and as unfaithful as we are. In spite of our failings to be the church, we marvel that you have called us to be your instrument in this world. As we, like the many saints before us, face uncertain times ahead, help us to remember that you are already there in the future, beckoning us toward yourself. Help us this day learn more about what it means to truly be the church, both for our times and for all time to come. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

IV. Introduction

I just recently came back home after a wonderful week’s holiday in England. I hadn’t been back to Great Britain since my college days and it was good to see old friends and reacquaint myself with the country. The state of religious life in England, sadly, seems to be on the decline.

In a recent London Times article headlined “Christianity Almost Beaten Says Cardinal,” there appeared a cartoon wherein a tourist couple gaze across a lawn toward a quaint little English church. “It’s a shame really,” says the cartoon woman, “it would make a lovely shop.” “Christianity has almost been vanquished in Britain, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Conner told a gathering of priests yesterday. Christ was being replaced by music, New Age beliefs, the environmental movement, the occult, and the free-market economy,” the Archbishop of Westminster said... [Said the Cardinal] ‘It does seem in our countries in Britain today, especially in England and Wales, that

Christianity, as sort of a backdrop to people's lives and moral decisions – and to the Government, the social life of the country – has now almost been vanquished.”¹

“Sort of a backdrop to people's lives”? Backdrops are one-dimensional painted illusions designed to fool the eye and make believable a fake world that exists only on stage. No wonder this kind of Christianity is one where Christ can be “replaced” by the free-market economy or music.

The church is either a cultural institution or it is an alternative community of faith. If it is a cultural institution, then it can survive even apart from what its members do or believe as long as the culture around it admits its presence. But if the church is an alternative community of faith, then its survival depends upon what its members do or believe in the context of the culture around it. Community is built upon people and a healthy community of faith changes the lives of the people in it.

V. The Church: The Biblical Perspective

As the bride of Christ, the church's singular purpose is to worship and exalt him. That purpose is never-ending; it is a perpetual one that will continue even (or especially) in heaven throughout eternity. After all, the “chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Why must worship be put first? Because worship necessarily has God as both its subject and its object: Worship is about reciting God's saving acts and deeds throughout history. We are invited by name to worship him. Therefore, we must accept the invitation to worship – with him as both its subject and object – before we turn our attention to any task, no matter how noble.

¹ Ruth Gledhill, “Christianity Almost Beaten Says Cardinal”, in *The London Times Online*, (Thursday, September 6, 2001). Available from <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,2-2001310271,00.html>.

The tasks of the church – evangelism, discipleship, teaching, social action, etc., - are both critical to our health and outgrowths of our purpose. They are also temporary, which is another reason we must go about them with zeal, for they will cease to be necessary at the end of time when Christ restores all things.

The tasks of the church are the response of joy to what God has done for us and what we have experienced in the community of worship. If our tasks are our “marching orders,” then how can we possibly go about them, in God’s strength and not our own, without hearing from our Leader?

There is a difference between the purpose of the church and the tasks of the church.

For theologian Ted Peters, the very definition of the church cannot be accurately set down apart from its story and its symbols (remember our discussion about postmodern worship being “image-driven”?) In Peters’ systematic theology written from a proleptic point of departure, the God of the future and his relationship with the church cannot begin to be understood until we recognize that he is also the God of the past.

The church is the historical arc between two terminals, Easter and the consummation. The church has been given the charge of bringing light to the world in this period while we await the full shining glory of God when even the sun will be surpassed in radiance. In the partial darkness of the present aeon, however, we must push on, following the path that the lamp of God’s word illumines, a word made audible in the church’s preaching, made visible in the celebration of the sacraments, and made tangible in the ministry of reconciling love... We can identify the presence of the church when and where the story of Jesus is being told with its significance, that is, where the word of God is being proclaimed... One of the problems Christians face today is that [the church’s] metaphors and symbols are widely thought to be incongruous with the actual church that exists on the plane of world history.²

² Ted Peters, *God- The World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press): 267, 269.

Marva Dawn centers on worship the tension between the purpose and tasks of the church: “Music often becomes the scapegoat after pastors have failed for years to train congregation members to evangelize in their daily lives. As previously noted, most conversions are the result of friendships, not worship style – but if reaching out has not occurred over the years, sometimes churches suddenly switch music and worship styles in order to ‘attract’ people. The music of the faithful Church is jettisoned to compensate for long-term failure to be the Church, inviting unbelievers by friendship and by active Christian life.”³

In this critical time when churches are rapidly decreasing in numbers and influence, how should Christian communities respond? For many, the answer has been to change their worship style, but this is not enough, unless a congregation’s entire ethos is changed in the process. In fact, the opposite is often the case, for the new worship styles of many parishes focus inward and on the individual instead of outward for the world’s sake. Then members and visitors only ask what worship means for them and what they can get out of it. Arthur Just asserts that this ‘has serious ramifications not only for our liturgiology and ecclesiology, but for our missiology as well.’ Outreach programs will continue to fail because, if ‘the vision of the worshiper is inward and the goal educational, then it is almost impossible to shape an evangelical vision for the church that is outward and transforming.’ Our worship should cause us to ask instead, Who is God? How does God want to use me and the community to which I belong for his purposes in the world? How does worship form us to be God’s people for this place and time?⁴

What is the theological base for describing the missiological aims of the community of believers that is church? Robert Webber recognizes four dominant, biblical images of the church: the people of God, the new creation, the fellowship in faith, and the body of Christ.⁵

³ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 166.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁵ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 78.

A proper theological basis for seeing the church as the people of God is found in the New Testament idea of *ecclesia*, the image of the church as “all the saints in Christ Jesus” (Phil.1:1). “These people are the people of God; God creates, calls, sustains, and saves the church. The origin of the church lies, then, in the work of the redemption through Jesus Christ. Just as the origin of Israel is rooted in the exodus event so the church is grounded in the Christ event, the primordial event of the Christian faith. For this reason, the church is designated by words that compare it with Israel. The church is ‘a chosen race,’ ‘a holy nation,’ ‘the true circumcision,’ ‘Abraham’s sons,’ ‘ heirs of David’s throne,’ ‘a remnant,’ and ‘the elect.’”⁶ The people of God are his covenant representatives on earth and will therefore reach out and engage the communities in which they live. This very concept alone, if properly taught and reinforced, would radically change how we thought about church and, more importantly, radically change the world around the church.

The second image of the church, “the new creation,” shows how it functions as God’s earthly community. “It is the community in which a new start in life has begun,” Webber writes. “As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17: ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he [or more accurately, the community] is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.’ This new creation has to be taken in both an individual and a corporate sense – a new person, a new community of people.”⁷ Christians are renewed – transformed – individually and corporately and will therefore reach out and engage the communities in which they live.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 79.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common... Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:42-47). We talk a lot these days about attracting people to our church through a variety of means, most typically through tinkering to some degree or another with worship. But what about the reverse idea of attracting the church to the people? The passage in Acts focuses mainly on the actions of the church’s “new creations” out in the community where they lived.

Theological support for the third and perhaps the most important image as it relates to missiology, “the fellowship in faith,” may be found in the early church. The church – God’s church, God’s new creation – shares a corporate life. For example, Luke describes the early Christians as being of “one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32) even going so far as to sell their personal possessions and live in actual physical community. “Living together was not easy, and the principles of being the church together had to be learned as each member of the community submitted to the rule of Christ. But faith in the end was to overcome the boundaries that separated people, transcending racial, economic, and sexual differences. ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female’ (Gal. 3:28). The character of the ‘fellowship in faith’ is to be far different from the character of other communities.”⁸

“...A theology that is truly trinitarian will also be completely communitarian. We maintain that theology. ...Theology, with its trinitarian structure, finds its integration

⁸ Ibid., 80.

through the concept of community. Community forms the theme that integrates the various strands of theological reflection into a single web or mosaic.”⁹

Healthy communities of faith will, out of a desire for extending their own community, reach out and engage the larger community in which they live. Living in community these days is far more difficult, especially given all the modern obstacles, mostly of our initial choosing, that separate us. A new day is coming for the church where the word “community” has only one context and definition. The community of the church will not, God willing, stop at the door.

The fourth image, “the body of Christ,” has its broad theological support in the writings of Paul. The picture of the body makes clear that the church – God’s church, God’s new creation that shares a corporate life – is a physical body of people who “truly are the continuation of the presence of Christ in the world. In Paul ‘the body of Christ’ is understood as antithetical to the ‘body of death.’ This contrast is expressed in Romans 5:12-21, a recapitulation passage. Here, there are two humanities: those who stand in solidarity with Adam and constitute the body of death, and those who stand in solidarity with Christ and constitute the body of life. Paul’s reference to the church as the body of Christ is therefore not a mere metaphor containing social and psychological value, but a statement about the relationship that exists between Christ and his body. It says that Christ is one with the church, that the existence of the church is an essential continuation of the life of Jesus in the world; the church is a divine creation which, in a mystical yet real way, coinheres with the Son who is made present through it.”¹⁰

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: WJK), 204.

¹⁰ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 81.

If Christ is indeed the head of the body of believers, its members will, out of obedience to the Head, reach out and engage the community in which they live.

In order to be effective in a postmodern world, it is necessary for evangelicals to deal with two specific [theological] problems inherited from the Enlightenment: (1) the emphasis on pragmatism, which has resulted in an a-theological understanding of the church; and (2) the emphasis on individualism, which has resulted in an a-historical view of the church. In the pragmatic view... the church as the body of Christ has been replaced by an efficient corporation. The pastor is the CEO and everyone else functions under the pastor's strong leadership.... A second theological view of the church is the model of the church as a political power base...

The second problem we have inherited from the Enlightenment is an a-historical attitude. Not all denominations and fellowships are equally a-historical. But for many, history is of little value. There is also a strong bias against the history preceding the Reformation.¹¹

VI. Observations and Recommendations

So, let's get to some specific observations and some specific recommendations about how the church might adapt and respond to the postmodern condition, especially in light of an examination of its modern holdover tendencies. (The numbered main points here are drawn from Robert Nash's "An 8-Track Church in a CD World" which appears in Sources Consulted. Unless otherwise noted, the comments and reflections are my own).

1. Many churches will die without substantial spiritual transformation. "Thousands of churches are about to die... The number one religious story of the next century will be the deaths of thousands of local Christian churches. These churches will die slow and painful deaths brought on by changing demographics and their unwillingness to face the reality of their own spiritual inadequacy."¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 75-76.

¹² Robert Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, p.55.

There is a new openness to things spiritual in our culture, but the church seems to be one of the last places you'll see or hear anything about it. People are hungry for non-nonsense, authentic, simple, un-slick, quiet spirituality. Many churches do not know how to achieve it because the modern tools and programs it uses can't relate to or perhaps even admit or permit spirituality.

How does your church attempt to meet the spiritual needs of its people? How spiritually meaningful are your worship services? What was the most spiritually significant event you experienced this year? Why was it so? How can the church cultivate more spiritual enrichment for you? For its people?

2. Revivals, crusades, and other evangelistic services as they are now practiced in most churches are outdated relics of a dying modern world.

It surprises me that a form of "worship" so relatively new in Christian history (they emerged in about the eighteenth century in England and the New World) has had such an enormous effect upon what our worship services look like today. Most Baptist church services these days are very close in design to the old revival service of long ago. In the first and second American Great Awakenings, people flocked to the "anxious benches" and realized their need for repentance, their deep need for God. Real revivals were "messy affairs" as Robert Nash describes them. The Spirit moved without warning, sins were confessed, people cried, shouted, and even barked like animals. Today, revivals are well ordered, sometimes well produced shows, but only shadows of their former selves. They used to be the main entry point for a non-churched person to come into the fellowship. Few nonchurchgoers would be caught at a modern revival.

Here's a point you may have never thought of: Revival services are the 18th and 19th century equivalent of the late 20th century seeker service. They were a way to get non-churched, unsaved folk into the church. But have we made the same mistakes with both?

3. "Plans of salvation" are dead. "By 'plans of salvation,'" Nash writes, "I mean the canned approaches to sharing Christian faith that have been so much a part of the 'technique' of the modern church..."¹³

The very phrase 'plan of salvation' smacks of a modern approach to sharing the Christian faith. It is neat, systematic, individualistic, well-ordered, and efficient. It is designed to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people in the shortest amount of time, which is certainly a modern goal if there ever was one! Plans of salvation such as the 'Roman Road,' the 'Four Spiritual Laws', and other tract-like approaches to faith certainly served their purpose in modernity... Millions of people entered Christianity through the methodological door of a 'plan of salvation.' Such approaches still work well when persons can immediately move into a spiritually vital community of faith. But herein lies the problem. Most churches are no longer spiritually vital. And most people are no longer interested in being part of a church assembly line. Such plans have served their purpose.¹⁴

This is one of the chief problems in my own denomination: We have traditionally excelled in getting people saved; we have traditionally failed at discipling them. Jesus has so much more for us than a "plan" for our life. He has a *living* for our life.

4. Being Christian in America must mean more than simply the avoidance of eternal punishment. The modern world responded well to the rational questions and propositions that the modern church offered. One of the most effective was, "You don't want to go to hell, do you?" When a modern person accepted Christ as savior, he or she was "saved" at that moment. And what came next could really never be as important.

¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

This modern proposition only worked when the culture at large believed in an actual hell.

Times have changed. Sixty percent of the American public now rejects the notion that Satan is a living being.¹⁵ Postmoderns want more than to avoid eternal punishment, they want a dynamic, life-changing relationship with Christ in the here and now. We must offer the world more than an eternal fire insurance policy.

5. Church members must stop ‘inviting people to church’ and start inviting people to Christ. I am convinced that one of the biggest problems our churches face today is that people have so thoroughly confused relationship with church and relationship with Christ. Think about the language you hear at church. We say, “Ol’ Bob’s been out of church for too long.” Or, “Suzanne needs to get in church.” What they really mean is “Bob’s not been living out his baptism into Christ,” or “Suzanne needs to meet Jesus and have a relationship with him.”

The tacit idea behind “getting somebody to church” is so that the ministers or whomever can do all the work in order to turn that person into a Christian. But we’ve already said that worship style – or even the minister’s sermon, for that matter – doesn’t win people to Christ. People win people to Christ.

6. The church must quit shoring up propositional truths about God while ignoring the need for an experience with God. I had a lady in our church call me recently to complain about some of the worship experiences we had used with our youth kids. “I’m very protective of my children,” she said. “I don’t want them to get all wrapped up in

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

emotionalism. Emotional religion scares me more than anything else in church. I don't want any part of it."

We have defended the Bible for so long – we have described the outside of the bottle for so long – that we have forgotten how to drink its contents. We don't have to defend the propositions of the Bible, its truths. Jesus is the truth.

Leonard Sweet writes,

Truth resides in relationships, not documents or principles. The Gospels don't teach us about Jesus as principle but Jesus as person. The power of a logo is that it transmutes image into identity, creating the very thing it symbolizes. In Jesus, the logos and the logo became one.

Not until the fourteenth century (at the earliest) did truth become imbedded in propositions and positions. The shift from 'troth' to 'truth' was the shift from truth residing in relationships to truth being found in documents and evidence...

When 'truth' could not be understood apart from the network of relationships connecting people to one another; when 'truth' had no independent status outside of obligations to God and to others: the biblical admonitions of 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), 'You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:32), and 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth' (John 16:13), had a very different ring to them. The quaint 'plight thee my troth' language beckons us back to a biblical drama where Truth was embodied in a person, where Truth resided in a relationship with the very image and incarnation of God.

Someday I will hold up my Bible before a congregation, shake it, and yell at the top of my lungs, 'This is not a book primarily about propositions and programs and principals. This is a book about relationships. This is a primer in connectedness. This is a book about you and God's love for you in God's only begotten Son.' Or in the words of Hugh Ross Mackintosh, 'When once the Gospel has been severed from a historic person, and identified with a complex of metaphysical ideas, what it ought to be called is scarcely worth discussion; that it is no longer Christianity, is clear.'

Jesus himself is the Truth.

Jesus himself is the Kingdom.

Jesus himself is the Life.

Before God and all witnesses, I plight my 'troth' to Jesus the Christ.¹⁶

7. We must embrace the Scriptures. Scripture must be central and significant in worship structure; it must permeate the service. I used to think that my denomination,

¹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 131-132.

Baptists, owned this issue: After all, we like to refer to ourselves as “People of the Book.” “No creed but the Bible,” our standard bearers have proclaimed. Now, with sadness, I realize that we seem to only pay lip service to this high minded moniker, for worship in many Baptist services is practically barren of meaningful Scripture reading. I say “meaningful” because, though we do have Bible reading in our services, the bits we do get are: 1) short passages, 2) read by the pastor, and 3) are generally not referred to again. How can “People of the Book” neglect Scripture so?

The instruction Paul writes to Timothy in I Timothy 4:1-16 (and particularly verse 13) is clear: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” If we believe that, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16), then our attitude toward Scripture in worship must surely reflect those truths. After all, it is in the gathered church where Christ is reunited with his body. Should that not then be the most important place and time when Scripture is read and taught?

I believe that the people – our people – would both like and need to have the words of life sung to them (and read and preached and taught) over and over again, as the old hymn goes. And I believe that they would both like and need to see ever more of the words’ beauty. As designers of worship, we will so comply if we are to be in obedience to Scripture itself and if we hear what God says about Scripture then act on his mandates.

8. Live out the faith. Postmodern people so very much want a sense of meaning and purpose for their lives, but they also live in a world where, increasingly, belief in most

anything is easy and costs very little. The church has much to say and to show, perhaps especially in a postmodern world. Our faith can be easily and naturally communicated by the way we live our lives. It might very well start out by us simply being kind. Do you realize how many people – even Christian people – are so unkind? Take a look into the eyes of the clerk at the Wal-Mart sometime. “Many of us have lived in the light of God’s story of Jesus Christ for years without the need for scientific verification of that life or the death and resurrection that make it so powerful. The meaningful life I live as a result of this story can speak volumes to others who now desperately seek a story by which to ground their own lives.”¹⁷

9. Take risks. Now is the time for our churches to take risks and risk-taking has always been an important part of our faith. Christ’s mandate for us to be “in the world but not of it” means taking risks. Ironically, many of our churches have turned Jesus’ dictum on its head and become “of the world but not in it.” We’ve become quite a lot like the world, ostensibly in a bid to engage it, but then have failed to do so.

Let’s take a risk and engage the world by becoming radically unlike it. Set aside the Sunday School quarterly for a month and spend the entire time in prayer. Encourage deacons to worship at other churches of other denominations occasionally. Focus on one ministry or program and do some honest, deep evaluation. Does it still meet needs? Is it a modern tool designed to fix modern problems that don’t really even exist anymore?

10. Draw from other Christian traditions and the full resources of Christian history. If you hear nothing else I say today, hear this one: Tradition must be restored to the

¹⁷ Robert Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 72.

church if we are to survive. I'm not talking about denominational tradition. I'm talking about the rich, deep, broad, far-reaching, tradition of classic Christianity, long, long before there were Catholics or Episcopalians or Baptists. If Lent is Catholic, then so is Easter. How long, friends, are we going to let knee-jerk reactions by some church members against anything they don't understand stop us from enriching the church by drawing from our history? Can other Christian traditions and the full resources of Christian history speak to the postmodern world? Yes!

We aren't called to preach the times. We are called to preach eternities to the times... The church infects the culture with truths, not trends. The church must not come down with the 'trendies.' A deadly disease, this affliction called 'trendinitis.' Not just because Christians must choose the heftier over the trendier, but mostly because 'trendinitis' misdiagnoses what is going on out there. We are living in a world where there are no more trends. Nothing is staying put or still long enough to become a trend. What's going on out there is terminally hip.

There is a difference between trailblazing and trendsetting. There is a difference between the spirit of newness and the spirit of nowness... The spirit of our times must be the Holy Spirit.

Leaders do not strive to replace the 'modern consciousness' with a 'postmodern consciousness.' Leaders help replace the 'modern consciousness' with a 'Christ consciousness' that can live and move and have its being in postmodern culture. If you remember nothing else..., remember this call for the church to recover tradition. We can become a 'traditional' church by nurturing a culture that is identifiably Christian and postmodern at the same time, not one that looks like postmodern culture itself. The EPIC church carries the brand of the past while being a barometer of the future.¹⁸

11. "Celebrate" communion. I've said before that communion was such an important element of worship for the early church because the people, in effect, got to see Jesus again. Imagine that! Because communion means reunited the Head, Jesus, with the Body of Christ, the people, worshipers around the table enjoy a special, unique communion in the truest sense with Christ. How we have ignored and relegated the table of the Lord. We Baptists "observe" (think about that term) the Lord's Supper once

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 48.

a quarter, whether we need to or not, and in some of the “contemporary”, praise and worship churches, the situation is much worse. You can’t even find a table in the room. (It might get in the way of the praise team).

The modern church wrung the life out of the Table by deciding that it was a symbol, and a rather empty one at that, merely meant to remind us of Christ’s death. And with that, the modern church also brought to bear on the Supper its customary efficiency and highly-scripted procedures.

Time won’t permit a discussion here on the important differences between the idea of sacrament and ordinance, but we must recognize that the Holy Spirit is uniquely present at the table and that something far more important is taking place there than a dry, empty ritual. Communion isn’t a dirge, it’s a dance. The Lord’s Supper isn’t a meeting, it’s a ministry. Communion must, must, must be restored in our worship. It must happen with more frequency, with more energy, and with more joy.

12. Reform the clergy. A pastor I once knew was the quintessential modern clergyman. He went to seminary to learn Bible knowledge and how to operate a church. He approached the position as a job. He ran the church like a worldly institution. His focus was, as he himself used to put it, “nickels and noses.” He saw himself as the provider of the vision and saw everyone else as the means by which his vision would be carried out. Church members, especially lay leaders, were viewed with some suspicion, potential obstacles to his vision and leadership. Dealing with frayed weather stripping on a church door or shopping for office supplies occupied more time than sermon preparation. I never knew him do any kind of personal Bible reading or devotional. The pulpit was used to address problems or “fix” things. Thanks be to God, this way of

thinking is changing. Churches are increasingly experiencing grassroots leadership and a “trickle up” approach to ministry. It’s long, long overdue.

The new landscape of reality in American culture dictates that church leaders ask questions instead of provide answers. Ministers in the old, modern church were viewed as the professional ‘experts’ who could provide answers to theological and practical questions...

In a postmodern church, ministers should view themselves as spiritual directors, who, because of their own close attention and allegiance to the way of Jesus, can enable others to find wholeness. The cultivation of a minister’s own contemplative and devotional lifestyle has never been more important. But the modern notion that the contemplative lifestyle can be maintained solely through a ‘daily quiet time’ couple with the short reading of a devotional guide must give way to the postmodern idea of a wholistic spirituality that pervades all of life.¹⁹

13. Observe the Sabbath. How do you tell time? It’s difficult not to let the world shape the way we think about time. Many Christians arrange their activities around the civic or academic calendars and think little of it. But the Bible’s view of time is much different than the world’s. For the ancient Hebrews and for the early church, all of time was meant to be redeemed for the Lord. Our contemporary notion of thinking that worship is a “Sunday thing” would be foreign to the first century believer. Romans 12 reminds us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” It encourages us to live all of life as a sacrifice unto the Lord. Worship happens 7 days a week and 12 months of the year!

Today, as the world demands and commands so much of our time, many evangelical denominations are returning to the ages-old, traditional Christian year as a meaningful way to mark time. The Christian year was developed over the centuries to help believers order their steps and “redeem the time.” In following the Christian year, we join with

¹⁹ Robert Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World*, 78.

believers all over the world and across the ages in a pilgrimage toward redeeming time for the Lord.

What does the calendar at your church look like for an average Sunday afternoon? Is it packed with activities and meetings? We are squeezing the very life out of our people by working them to death. We are teaching them that working at the church is the same thing as discipleship and that work at the church is more important than worship at the church. Isn't Sunday supposed to be a day of rest and of worship?

The Sabbath can serve as a doorway to renewed spirituality in the life of a congregation. The observance of the Sabbath in an intentionally spiritual sense is largely ignored by most Christians today. And yet Sunday is already a welcomed interruption for most of us. It is a day of rest in which we worship, nap, read the paper, and take a short walk. A slight reorientation of the mind and heart can turn this day into a spiritual holiday that reminds us of the sacredness of time and space and reintroduces a sense of the holy into our lives...

The Sabbath affords us the opportunity to practice the kind of wholistic spirituality that is essential to the Christian life. On this single day, we can dance with God in an intentional way. And this day can become a model for the living out of other days as we heighten our awareness of our own spiritual dance with God. Most importantly, it provides us with the rare opportunity to reflect upon the distance between God and self and make the necessary changes that help to bridge the gap.²⁰

VII. Small Group Activities/Questions

Group 1: Talk about the difference between the purpose of the church and the tasks of the church. Do you agree with what I have proposed here? Has the church confused the two?

Group 2: Take the first 7 of the 13 points of observation or recommendation and deliberate on which you believe to be the most important. Can these things be accomplished in your denominational context?

²⁰ Ibid., 79.

Group 3: Take the last 6 of the 13 points of observation or recommendation and deliberate on which you believe to be the most important. Can these things be accomplished in your denominational context?

Group 4: Consider this statement: When the Reformers split away from the Roman Church, they threw the traditional baby out with the Catholic bath water. Do you agree? How has this affected the way we think about church today?