LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

MICRO-KINGDOM:
A THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL APOLOGETIC
FOR THE MICROCHURCH MODEL AS AN EFFECTIVE AND FAITHFUL
NEW TESTAMENT EXPRESSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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MICRO-KINGDOM: A THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL APOLOGETIC FOR THE MICROCHURCH MODEL AS AN EFFECTIVE AND FAITHFUL NEW TESTAMENT EXPRESSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Rae Lynn. This milestone is ours together. Your sacrifice and patience are beyond anything that I could have imagined. Thank you for believing so strongly and sacrificing so unselfishly.

To Rene’, Ali, and Rylie. You experienced many moves and changes during this doctorate. Thank you for your patience, persistence, and encouragement. I am so grateful to be your dad.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Western church in the twenty first century has experienced significant decline.\(^1\) Denominations and mission agencies are responding with renewed emphases in church planting and re-planting, church revitalization, and increased involvement in social justice issues. As many churches and denominations are redefining themselves in terms of how the church is to live out its mission, the term “missional” has become common cultural language. Although the term has a variety of inferences depending upon one’s religious culture, this thesis will define the term ‘missional’ as “the incarnational community, namely the ‘church,’ living as an extension of God’s missionary presence in the world through the discernment of and response to the world’s continually changing contexts in the ongoing process of the restoration of creation to reflect the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.”\(^2\) In light of this designation, the church is defined as the incarnational community of believers whose purpose is missional.


\(^2\) This definition has been adapted from three primary sources: David Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form, and Function are Redefining American Christianity” (Phd diss., University of Pretoria, South Africa, 2017), 134;
Accompanying the church’s response through a widespread re-identification in light of its missional purpose is an unprecedented level of cooperation, both nationally and internationally, among churches, denominations and mission agencies. The cultural shifts have led to a new receptiveness in the creation of culturally and theologically diverse networks to lead the Western church towards a revitalized movement of discipleship and church growth, hopefully reversing the trend of the recent decades.

With these exciting possibilities, wisdom and discernment must be eagerly pursued. Leaders in various mission agencies, denominations, and individual churches must be careful to examine their foundational presuppositions, both theological and pragmatic, as they incorporate new ideas and perspectives which result from this increased collaboration. If new churches are planted and revitalization is attempted using updated methods without also challenging erroneous understandings of the Kingdom, mission, and missional community, then there will be no lasting change. Instead, the separation will continue to widen between the church and the surrounding culture threatening the loss of an entire generation of Millennials and Gen. Z. It is, therefore, imperative for the Western church to reexamine its theology of Kingdom and mission as strategies are created for how the church is to live this out. This includes the identification of existing presuppositions and theological misconceptions. In other words, the Western church

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Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 2000, 51; and Matthew 6:10. All Scripture is quoted from the *New International Version* (NIV), Biblica, 2011.


4 Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, “Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation” (2018), 10. Barna found that Millennials (1981-1999) are distinct from the generation that followed, popularly called Gen Z (born between 1999-2015), in their values, assumptions, and worldview. While more Millennials are shifting towards no religious affiliation (Nones), a large percentage of the Gen Z population are starting out with no religious identity (see Barna, 25) and have little interest of moving towards any religious affiliation.
must work towards the development of a proper New Testament theology, missiology, and ecclesiology so appropriate methodologies can be developed concerning how to live out the Kingdom mission through the various expressions of the global Church, including local church bodies, denominations, and mission agencies.

Developing a proper theological foundation is a slow process in contrast to how quickly methodology is created and implemented. American culture is one of speed, change, and experimentation. The culture values pragmatism with little patience for analysis and deliberation. Defining Kingdom and mission in light of the Western cultural norms of consumerism, materialism, naturalism, domination through power, etc. has hampered the church’s ability to seek clarity concerning an appropriate New Testament understanding of Kingdom-mission and how this is lived out through the body of Christ. For decades, identifying theological and methodological misconceptions was not a priority since churches and denominations continued to grow in weekly attendance. As church attendance waned in the late twentieth century, a surge of scholarly and popular works were written to clarify the reasons for decline and to offer applicable solutions. The response began to expose the weaknesses of merely attracting people to consume church programs thus leading to greater interest in the New Testament mandate for discipleship as the measure of success and the creation of new models to live this out.

The microchurch model is one consequence of this response. It is the church in its most primal and simplest form resembling the networks of house churches found in the New Testament. The microchurch model seeks to emphasize both aspects of the term ‘missional-community.” It empowers the development of culturally-relevant strategies while highlighting multiplicative growth by making disciples who make disciples. The microchurch is a methodological and ecclesiological paradigm shift towards processes and systems that require higher levels of responsibility and participation by individuals, but much less capital resources. As a result, the model has been highly successful in underdeveloped, less-resourced church movements around the world, especially in Asia, Africa, and South America. Yet, before denominations and mission agencies begin recommending and applying the microchurch concept, a development that has already begun interdenominationally through the Exponential church planting and multiplication network, it should be examined theologically, missionally, and ecclesiologically to determine if it is an appropriate, biblical, and effective model for mission agencies, denominations, and local churches to utilize as they seek to live out their missional Kingdom-design.

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8 The perpetuation of disciples making disciples began with Jesus inviting his first disciples to join him to become “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19, Mk 1:17, Lk 5:10) and ended with his command to all disciples to continue to “go and make disciples” of all people groups (Mt 28:19-20, Lk 24:46-47, Acts 1:8). This idea was frequently perpetuated by Paul through his teaching (2 Tm 2:2) and his ministry of discipling other leaders such as Silas and Timothy.


10 Exponential is a multi-denominational network of church and denominational leaders and religious organizations “committed to accelerating the multiplication of healthy, reproducing faith communities. We equip movement makers with actionable principles, ideas and solutions. We are passionate about accelerating multiplication through movement makers.” www.exponential.net.
Need for this Study

Brian Sanders, the leader of the Florida-based “Tampa Underground,” one of the most notable proponents of the microchurch model at the time of writing, asked pastors, missionaries, and denominational leaders at the 2019 Exponential Conference in Orlando, FL:

What if I asked you to make a choice? On the one hand, I promise you a thousand people who will come and listen to you preach and be part of your church service, but if you accept, you’ll never have more than 100 people engaged in mission. That’s option 1. Option 2 is that “I promise you right now 1000 people fully engaged in mission and part of your community. But if you choose this, you’ll never have more than 100 people gather for worship. Which would you choose?11

For Sanders, this is a question every Western pastor must indirectly answer and most choose Option 1. Considering the culture’s consumeristic and individualistic tendencies, Western churches often applaud the megachurch as the definition of success, seeking to attract large crowds of spectators through concert-style performances, consumer-focused programs, and emotive experiences that they hope will quickly lead to the “growth” of the church. While the motives are often pure, the underlying suppositions are equally flawed. Western pastors characteristically seek life-transformation in the Body of Christ through the power of the Spirit. Yet, like pastors in every culture, American pastors are victim to the influence of their cultural heritage. Their understanding of ‘church’ is shaped by the Western expectation of attendance in a culturally-relevant, public meeting space where the commodities of worship, teaching, and prayer are provided to spectators rather than with participants. Charles Taylor quips that the unintentional result is a church “emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality.”12

Western culture emphasizes the primacy of the individual which is antithetical to a biblical Christian faith based on a community of Christ-followers that willingly submit the self to God and one-another.\(^\text{13}\) As a result, Western churches typically compete for attenders who “shop” for the church they believe is best suited to meet their needs.\(^\text{14}\) The core concepts of evangelism and discipleship have been redefined as “attracting attenders” and “persuading people to volunteer for church programs.” Often, a church’s success is determined quantifiably by measuring the number of people in attendance, the number of response cards returned, the size of the offering, the number of people serving, or even the number of baptisms. This is the inadvertent paradigm of many pastors and denominational leaders who seek to lead their churches biblically and effectively, yet are unaware how deeply entrenched they are in the secular presuppositions that often contradict the upside-down Kingdom of God in which they are called to live.

Measuring quantifiable factors is not what makes this approach problematic, for even the book of Acts reports that 3000 people “were added to their number” after Peter’s Pentecost sermon.\(^\text{15}\) The issue is limiting the definition of success to these measurables. Jesus’ Great Commission was to make disciples.\(^\text{16}\) His “new commandment” was to love one other as he loved.\(^\text{17}\) Jesus’ ministry with and to his disciples reveals the vague and frustratingly slow process of transformation that characterizes discipleship. A definition of success that is limited only to what is quantifiable has inadvertently steered the Western church towards the inappropriate

\(^{13}\) Taylor, 429.  
\(^{14}\) Hirsch, 116.  
\(^{15}\) Acts 3:41.  
\(^{16}\) Mt 28:19-20.  
\(^{17}\) Jn 13:34.
objective of a locale where an event is observed by non-participating attenders who are being served and accommodated to ensure their continued attendance. This bears no resemblance to the New Testament idea of a missional family with whom all mutually sacrifice together towards the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom purposes.

The microchurch seeks to upend this Western understanding of church through its unwavering pursuit of Sanders’ “Option 2,” to rediscover the church’s identity as a Kingdom-community and fully engage this community in God’s Kingdom-mission with much less emphasis on church service attendance. This model is being advanced through a combination of scholarly research seeking to define an appropriate methodology, missiology, and ecclesiology; and through evaluation and revision of the methods of the local church in a twenty first century context. As a result, the microchurch offers notable potential towards revitalizing and refocusing the church in the West.\textsuperscript{18} It is this potential that warrants examination before it is applied carte blanche to churches and church agencies around the world. The stakes are too high to consent to an unvetted model that could cause further damage to the church’s relationship to the culture. In the current pluralistic, postmodern culture, the church cannot afford to continue losing ground as a result of theologically-inadequate models.

\textbf{Research Question}

The microchurch model is an innovative model in both its acknowledgment of and response to the current state of decline of the Western church.\textsuperscript{19} The Tampa Underground,

\textsuperscript{18} Sanders, \textit{Underground Church}. In his first 3 chapters, Brian Sanders describes this journey towards an academic and real world evaluation that led to his development of the Tampa-based Underground Church.

\textsuperscript{19} See footnote 1.
Kansas City Underground, and Life in Deep Ellum are recent attempts at applying the microchurch model.\textsuperscript{20} With over a decade of data, these churches provide a sizable quantity of information to assess the model’s effectiveness theologically, missiologically, and ecclesiologically.\textsuperscript{21} A scholarly examination is imperative since the long-term implications and effectiveness of the microchurch model have yet to be established. Before the strategy is endorsed as a working model by denominations, mission agencies, and individual church planters it must be vetted to determine whether the model is congruent with a proper New Testament theology of the church’s Kingdom-mission and if the model effectively fulfills the mandate of “making disciples” in a post-Christian, Western context.\textsuperscript{22}

In summary, this study is an academic examination of the microchurch model. Its objective is to determine whether this is a church and discipleship model that is both effective and biblical concerning the New Testament concept of church, Kingdom, and mission. To appropriately evaluate the model, three steps will be taken. First, an appropriate New Testament theology of Kingdom and mission will be identified and defined. Second is the identification of the predominant methodological patterns utilized in the Western church to fulfill this mission, which will then be contrasted with the microchurch strategy in the third step. The goal of this


\textsuperscript{21} The Tampa Underground, Kansas City Underground, and Life in Deep Ellum each define themselves as “churches” by New Testament standards but can also be defined as church networks similar to the network of churches that were developed in the first century. See Randy Stark, Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome (NY: HarperOne, 2006), 14.

study is to establish whether the microchurch model should be recommended as an appropriate church strategy in the twenty first century.

Limitations

The current research will be limited in the following ways: Theologically, this study will be restricted to a multi-denominational understanding of Kingdom and mission as defined by Newbigin, Bosch, and McKnight emphasizing the church’s fundamental role in fulfilling Jesus’ command to “go into all the world and make disciples” (Mt 28:19-20) as a foretaste of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). In Newbigin’s words, “The mission of the church is in fact the church’s obedient participation in that action of the Spirit by which the confession of Jesus as Lord becomes the authentic confession of every new people.”23 While important to the broad discussion, space considerations require the exclusion of the conceptions of Kingdom and mission that diverge from this understanding.

Concerning its historical perspective, the reasons for the decline of the Western church are complex and many theories exist to explain them.24 This study will not seek to debate the various factors, but will accept the widely accepted position that the Western church is in


decline. It will also limit the scope of the decline to the latter half of the twentieth century to the present.

Finally, though the Tampa Underground’s understanding of the microchurch model is already being expanded internationally, especially in Europe, this study will limit its scope to the model’s application within a primarily American context. While the principles and applications may translate internationally, the scope is too broad for this study.

**Research Methodology**

Since a proper evaluation of the microchurch model requires the study of theological, historical, and sociocultural contexts, this thesis will take a bibliographic approach. The objective is to determine an appropriate missiological and ecclesiological view of the Kingdom by which to evaluate the microchurch model. To accomplish this task, previously published research from several disciplines will be utilized.

Since current approaches of missiology and ecclesiology did not develop in a vacuum, the first step towards defining how the church lives out its identity as God’s Kingdom people and mission is to examine how these concepts have historically been interpreted and realized. Historical studies will be employed to understand the trajectories that led to the mindset and methodologies prevalent in the Western church in the twenty-first century. This will be followed by an investigation of scholarly works in the fields of theology, missiology, and ecclesiology to examine the New Testament understanding of Kingdom and mission and how this is expected to be lived out in the life of the local church.

The historical and theological background is necessary to properly evaluate the microchurch model since a description of what should be lived out is required before an evaluation can occur concerning how it is or can be lived out. With this foundation, it is then
possible to formulate an adequate definition and assessment of the microchurch. Though the microchurch model is a fairly new model, earlier missional works will be utilized along with recently published works specifically concerning the microchurch.

**Organization of Thesis**

After a general introduction, this thesis comprises three sections. It begins by defining the purpose of the church within a proper New Testament understanding of Kingdom and mission. Second, the established theological framework will be used to evaluate current Western models of church in achieving its intended mission. Third, the microchurch model will be contrasted against the existing models to determine if it is a strategy that corresponds with an appropriate NT theology of mission, and effectually, if it is worthy of recommendation for the next generation of church planters and denominational leaders.

This thesis is organized into the following chapters:

*Chapter 2 – A History of Mission and Kingdom Understanding.*

This chapter briefly examines the church’s historical interpretation of the kingdom and its mission from the early church, its transition into Christendom, and from Modernity to post-Modernity. As the Western church’s influence declines amongst its surrounding culture, accomplishing its purpose requires a rediscovery of its original purpose and mission.

*Chapter 3 – A Theology of Mission.*

This chapter seeks to create a standard by which the microchurch model is evaluated. Building on the context provided in chapter two, an appropriate definition is formulated concerning what it means for the church to exist as a kingdom-people for the purpose of God’s preexistent mission in the world.
Chapter 4 – Defining the Microchurch

This chapter attempts to define the microchurch through an ecclesiological comparison with the prevailing attractional church model in terms of making disciples as Jesus commanded based upon the three ecclesial minimums: worship, community, and mission.

Chapter 5 – Evaluating the Microchurch

Based upon the ecclesial minimums of chapter four, the microchurch is evaluated in this chapter for its potential to better fulfill the purpose and mission of the church than the current prevalent models of the western church.

Review of Literature

The literature in this study is divided into two categories: 1) A review of the historical progression and theological relationship between the concepts of kingdom and mission, and 2) a review of the works which by which the microchurch will be defined and evaluated.

Historical and Theological Sources

In practically every discipline, context is everything. To effectively evaluate the microchurch model, the model must be placed in its historical context and contrasted with the current models. Questions must be asked that include: “How does the church define its purpose and mission?,” “How has this understanding evolved throughout history?,” and “Does the Western church model need to be improved upon in the accomplishment of its purpose and mission?” The difficulty of answering these questions is that every author’s context and understanding influences their conclusions. This contextual understanding will be taken into consideration throughout this thesis.
Of the various works available, few authors are more foundational and more cited that Lesslie Newbigin. Theologically, Newbigin’s *The Open Secret* and *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* suggest that Christian identity is united with its mission and that “there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission.”  

Newbigin begins with the confession, “The church is a pilgrim people on its way to the ends of the earth and the end of time,” and concludes with the assertion that “a church that is not ‘the church in mission’ is no church at all.”  

Foundational to the current evaluation of the microchurch is Newbigin’s contention that mission is not a task the church undertakes but is the very identity of the church itself. Understanding how this has been interpreted in Christian history is benefited through his *Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* contrasting the gospel’s influence and power in the first century and through the Christendom society of the last seventeen hundred years. Newbigin adeptly exposes the underlying presuppositions of modern Western culture which are incompatible with a biblical worldview. This is especially illustrated in the pervasive confusion of the American Dream as the gospel itself.  

In contrast, in his work *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, the incarnation is revealed as the fulfillment of the story of God’s mission to include all peoples in a Kingdom. This is a story that began in the book of Genesis culminating in the post-resurrection community of faith where Jesus is understood as the “first fruits of a harvest that is still to come.”

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26 Ibid, loc.23. Kindle.

27 Ibid, loc.36. Kindle.

and that is the end of all God’s works.”

David Bosch’s seminal work *Transforming Mission*, develops a theology of mission within its historical context. The first two sections (‘NT Models of Mission’ and ‘Historical Paradigms of Mission’) are essential to understanding how the concepts of kingdom and mission were so diversely interpreted throughout the various ages of Christianity through the postmodern period. Like Newbigin, Bosch’s premise is that Christianity is defined not by beliefs or activities but through its central role as the means through which God will bless the world. Bosch’s desire is not merely descriptive, his agenda is to redefine kingdom, mission, and church as a process where God’s kingdom-desire for all of humanity is to be united with him and participate with him. The church as God’s ambassadors to the world is the means by which God’s desire will be attained.

Theologically, a modern investigation of the Kingdom of God can rightly begin with George Ladd as arguably the most influential voice in the twentieth century understanding of Kingdom, especially his *Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* and *A Theology of the New Testament*. Foundational to the trajectory of current Kingdom-studies, Ladd popularized the concept of a kingdom which was both “present and not yet.” He asserted that while the KOG is present now it is also a kingdom of the future. He states,

29 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, IL: WB Eerdmans, 1986). *Open Secret*, loc.402. Kindle. *Open Secret*, loc. 497. Kindle. I agree with Newbigin that the mission of God is one that is based in Jesus’ resurrection. For the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is the Spirit that moves and empowers the church to accomplish the missio dei. As Paul describes in 1 Cor.15:23, the resurrection is a depiction of what is to come as the church brings the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven through the power of the Spirit until the final hope is fulfilled at Christ’s return.

The Kingdom of God is basically the rule of God. It is God's reign, the divine sovereignty in action. God's reign, however, is manifested in several realms, and the Gospels speak of entering into the Kingdom of God both today and tomorrow. God's reign manifests itself both in the future and in the present and thereby creates both a future realm and a present realm in which men may experience the blessings of His reign.31

Ladd brought consensus to formerly diverging views of the Kingdom promoting unity within Christ’s Body through his acknowledgment and appreciation of the rich and varied traditions of the early Church’s interpretations of the Kingdom. Ladd was convinced that the New Testament Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus’ understanding and emphasis of the Kingdom was the reference point for the other New Testament authors. While there may have been significant differences in the early church concerning how to live out the Gospel, Ladd demonstrates that there was unity in how they defined the Gospel as a missional Kingdom inaugurated in Jesus which was coupled with their eager expectation for it to be fully realized.32

Following Ladd, John Bright’s The Kingdom of God traced the history of the concept of God’s Kingdom through the entire biblical story concluding that the concept of Kingdom is of central importance to biblical theology and the characterization of the Gospel.33 He sought to explain the Kingdom of God as the unifying theme linking the two testaments together describing how “Kingdom” in the biblical story becomes more complex as the story progresses, yet is always tied to mission. From a very different theological camp, Jürgen Moltmann’s contribution to the ideas of Kingdom and mission have been similarly noteworthy. In The Trinity

Moltmann emphasizes the necessity of an ecumenical dialogue between diverse traditions, including the Jewish tradition, as essential to a proper understanding of God and his mission. For Moltmann, the Kingdom of God is a weaving of the missional and relational as the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity extends outward to Creation as God the Son preaches to all peoples that the Kingdom of the Father is near and available to all. Through various images of submission, justice, and mercy, the Father’s Kingdom is one in which there are no servants but only free children who are compelled to participate in the Kingdom. It is compulsion not through obedience and submission but through love and free participation. Jesus’ manifests the Kingdom by giving honor to the poor, bringing wholeness to the sick, and life to the dead. The Kingdom of God is marked by the King washing the feet of his disciples and commanding them to do the same.

With both an appreciation for and disparity with Ladd, Scot McKnight’s The King Jesus Gospel and Kingdom Conspiracy are helpful as theologies specifically acknowledging their historical context. In McKnight’s view, while Ladd may be correct in looking at the present and future aspects of the Kingdom, his weakness is minimizing the past. McKnight seeks to rediscover the original meaning of the kingdom and gospel recognizing Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament kingdom-story of a people living out God’s mission to invite all of creation into its designed relationship and partnership under the reign of Jesus the King. The missio Dei


and the Kingdom of God were at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. Jesus’ revolutionary and unexpected understanding of “Kingdom” and the Gentile’s role within the kingdom developed far beyond that of the Hebrew prophets and first century Jewish leaders. McKnight suggests this interpretation of the Kingdom was revised, even abolished, with Constantine’s commencement of Christendom which produced a modified gospel of personal salvation, hierarchical leadership, individualism, Christian nationalism, and control by the elite. In contrast, the New Testament notion of God’s Kingdom is based solely on faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament story. The Kingdom is therefore lived out as Jesus’ family community participates in the sharing and perpetuation of restoration and proclamation in the world, most often while persecuted.

Ralph Winter, as editor and author, has also been a major contributor to the theological and missiological interpretation of Kingdom that is tied to an ecclesiological understanding of how the church should carry out its mission. His Perspectives on the World Christian Movement is one of the most significant contributions to this field of study, especially as it reveals the manner in which Western culture has permeated Western Christianity and its missionary exportation to the rest of the world. Perspectives offers a multifaceted compilation of biblical, theological, and missiological scholars weighing in concerning the church’s role in the advance


38 This thesis concurs with “gospel” as defined by Scot McKnight as “the story of Jesus as the resolution of Israel’s story.” Scot McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 44.

of God’s Kingdom. Winter offers multiple examples how Western methodology has led to both positive and negative results in a variety of cultures, and how foreign cultures are breaking free from imported Western traditions to discover new ways in which the Kingdom and mission can be effectively expressed in their own cultures. Perspectives seeks to compare and contrast these new expressions from both a biblical and cultural viewpoint.

Two of the more philosophical works cited are Richard Bauckham’s *Bible and Mission*40 and Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*.41 Bauckham’s work contrasts the themes of universality and particularity in proposing a biblical hermeneutic which emphasizes the role of mission in the Christian story as it is read historically and then applied to the current post-modern context. God uses the particular (i.e. the individual, the church) to achieve salvation for the many. In juxtaposition, Taylor’s *A Secular Age* looks at the progression of history that has led to the current postmodern, secular age currently experienced in the West. Especially helpful is Taylor’s explanation of the Enlightenment’s impact on the demise of Christianity’s influence in society.

A variety of other works are utilized in this thesis to provide historical and theological context concerning the interpretation of Kingdom and mission. Ed Smither’s *Mission in the Early Church* is an excellent overview of how mission was understood and practiced in the first century.42 N.T. Wright’s *The New Testament and the People of God* and *How God Became King* provide helpful theological perspective concerning the New Testament writer’s perception of


Kingdom and mission.\textsuperscript{43} Also beneficial is Christopher Wright’s \textit{The Mission of God} and \textit{The Mission of God’s People} both emphasizing the necessity of the Old and New Testament for a proper defining of Kingdom and mission.\textsuperscript{44} Sigurd Grindheim’s \textit{Living in the Kingdom of God} not only explains how God’s rule and reign are established through the work of Christ, but it is also helpful in understanding the implications for how the church is to live out the Kingdom on earth.\textsuperscript{45}

Although Alan Hirsch’s primary contribution will be in the evaluation of the microchurch model, \textit{Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements}\textsuperscript{46} pinpoints the focus of the Jesus’ Kingdom mission squarely on the church as the means through which the Kingdom is lived out on earth as it is in heaven. Hirsch seeks to rouse a longing for God’s Kingdom similar to that of the early church by recounting the yearning of the early church and contrasting that with the seeming loss of passion and focus in the Western church today. For Hirsch, a rediscovery of the church’s Kingdom-mission is to rediscover an attribute of God himself. God is a missional God who invites the world to join him in that mission. Living out the Kingdom mission is the essence of discipleship.

Finally, while polls and surveys can be helpful in establishing the current state of the church in the West, they also run the risk of painting a picture merely of what the culture thinks


is the current state of the church. Polls and surveys rely on samples of people who interpret the questions being asked through their theological, cultural, ecclesiological, and missiological lenses. To limit the interpretational bias, it is necessary to utilize the most reliable, peer-reviewed polls and surveys. While not necessarily limited to these organizations, this thesis will focus on the recent statistical research from the Barna Group, Gallup, and the Pew Research Center.47

Microchurch Sources

The final category of sources for review are those concerning the specific structures and methods of the microchurch model. Since one of the more influential microchurch movements is the Tampa Church led by Brian Sanders, clarity for the vision, method, and theological argument will be ascertained primarily through two of Sander’s works: Microchurches: A Smaller Way and Underground Church.48 Various speeches will also be referenced.

While Sanders offers a proven methodological foundation, Alan Hirsch’s theological and missiological offering are as academic as they are robust. His specialty is reframing the church as a dynamic community for the purpose of fulfilling the missio Dei. While a number of his works are utilized, Hirsch’s two most referenced works in this thesis are Reframation and The Forgotten Ways.49 The former seeks to expose the Western church’s minimalization of the gospel as God’s message to individuals for personal salvation to a broader understanding of what

God is doing through the community for the restoration of all Creation. The latter seeks to redefine the church as dynamic missional community that lives out the *missio Dei* together.

Foundational to the broader missional church movement in general, and the microchurch model specifically, Neil Cole’s influence has been second to none prior to his seminal *Organic Church* published in 2009. *Church 3.0* is a wider work that offers theological foundations and organizational structures to move the church from and institutional model to a community model.⁵⁰ Like Sanders and Hirsch, Cole seeks to stir the imagination of the church towards a renewed vision of empowered missional communities that exist within the communities they seek to reach.

A number of other sources have proven valuable. Ed Stetzer’s *Planting of Missional Church* offers a foundation for a missional expression of the church with an emphasis on multiplication rather than addition.⁵¹ Frank Viola’s *Finding Organic Church* and *Reimagining Church* provide detailed examples concerning how the microchurch is lived out in daily practice.⁵² Others such as Hugh Halter, Dave Ferguson, Rob Wegner, and Bob Roberts are successful practitioners experienced in leading and training in the micro and missional church models. Also, a variety of applicable journals and works have been published from various

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Articles by Darrell Whiteman and the Barna Group reveal contextualization difficulties the church is experiencing and propose solutions for churches and mission agencies.¹³

Summary

In order to properly assess whether the microchurch model is a biblically appropriate and effectual model, it is necessary to set a standard by which it is measured and to determine if the current models are in need of revision. The literature utilized in chapters two and three offer historical and theological context to formulate the missiological, ecclesiological, and kingdom-theology by which the microchurch evaluated. This study, therefore, plays an important role in determining whether the microchurch model should be recommended to churches, denominations, and parachurch organizations as a strategy worthy of investment.

CHAPTER 2 – A HISTORY OF MISSION AND KINGDOM UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

To properly evaluate the theological appropriateness of a church model, it is first necessary to establish a plumb line by which it is assessed. This is not a modest task. Church models are inherently diverse depending upon the culture in which they exist. Consequently, church models cannot be considered normative. Even within the New Testament, there is a stark contrast between the first generation Jewish church and the succeeding Jewish/Gentile patterns that developed out of Peter’s interaction with Cornelius (Acts 10) and subsequent defense to the Jewish believers (Acts 11), the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and Paul’s missionary journeys.\(^5^4\)

Though opposition was common in every setting, the church repeatedly adapted its structures to accomplish its mission and purpose. Therefore, an analysis is beneficial whether the microchurch model is a continuation of the church’s ongoing reformation to contextualize the gospel to its current culture or if it is merely acquiescing to the norms, assumptions, and power structures of the culture in which it resides with little regard to mission and purpose. In other words, does the microchurch model offer a theologically viable and more effective alternative than the prevalent Western church model to accomplish its mission and purpose or is it merely the next fad catering to Western consumeristic desires for something different and wide-reaching? With the growing

investment and application of the microchurch model in Western missiology and ecclesiology, it is imperative for the microchurch model to be evaluated theologically, ecclesiologically, and missiologically to determine if it offers a biblically appropriate expression of the community of Christ living out their calling as the people of God to invite all to salvation through Christ?

Specifying the criterion by which the microchurch is evaluated first requires an identification of the purpose and mission of the church and a determination of which is primary. Is mission an activity that the church performs, or is mission the purpose for which the church exists? This query is critical to the establishment of a standard by which any church model is assessed. If mission is primary arising out of God’s very nature, then the church exists for and submits to God’s mission since God’s activity in the world is more expansive than the church. If the church is primary, then mission is merely an aspect of the church’s activity and is therefore subject to the church’s authority. Both positions have notable representation historically. A recognition of the past is significant to assess the microchurch’s theological veracity and cultural applicability since “any attempt to deal with the present without awareness of what has gone before can only lead to distorted vision and false judgment.” Therefore, this chapter will concentrate on relevant historical approaches concerning how the church has interpreted its mission and purpose. The objective of this effort is to provide context for chapter three’s defining of the theological criterion by which the microchurch model will be evaluated.


This historical overview will begin with a brief summary of the first century church and the manner in which it lived out its mission in a culture notably similar to the current post-Modern, post-Christendom culture of the twenty first century. The study will then proceed to the rise of Christendom in the early fourth century and the consequent changes that persisted all the way into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as western culture transitioned to the current Post-Christendom culture. Unfortunately, though a worthy topic of study, a thorough exploration of the interpretation of mission and kingdom through the first fifteen hundred years of Christendom is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, a survey of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the transition to the current post-Christian paradigm is sufficient to provide context for identifying the presuppositions and biases that the microchurch model seeks to rectify. The dilemma will become apparent when attempting to separate the identity of the church (what it is) from its mission (what it does) and its purpose (why it exists) since the church’s identity is perpetually tied to mission and purpose. Acknowledging the risks of using such a complex term as “Christendom,” within this study the term will be used to define the basic institutional expression of the Church that has predominated the West since the early fourth century. This expression typically includes a set of beliefs, activities, and facilities in which people are invited to partake within a congregational setting led by designated clergy.\footnote{This definition of Christendom is typically used within the missional-writings of Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosh, and Neil Cole. Stuart Murray defines modern churches within a Christendom context as typically understood as “institutions, buildings, or congregations,” Stuart Murray, \textit{Church After Christendom} (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 37 (Scribd).}
The First Generation

During his three years of earthly ministry, Jesus taught his disciples to pray to the Father, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:9). When joined with Jesus’ final words as recorded in Matthew’s gospel, the framing of the mission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” there is a union of missiology and ecclesiology within the kingdom purpose of the church. The answer to the missiological question “What is the church to do?” is “Go and make disciples.” The answer to the ecclesiological question “How is this accomplished?” is to “Go to all peoples baptizing these new disciples into the community and teaching them to obey Jesus’ instruction.” This is the definition of what it means to follow Jesus.

Yet, the idea of God’s kingdom being represented on earth through the church as the anticipation of what the future kingdom will look like has typically been understood differently, even by the earliest followers. Acts 10 records the necessity of a paradigm shifting dream before Peter could forsake his Jewish tradition and go into the house of a Roman officer to share the gospel. The result of this meeting was shocking to the Jewish believers. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles” (Acts 10:44-45). It was only after the Gentiles displayed the

58 Matthew 28:19-20. This mission is reiterated in Acts 1:8 that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

59 Specifically, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34).
outward sign of being filled with the Spirit that the Jewish missionaries understood Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations. Yet, when “the apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God, the circumcised believers criticized [Peter]” (Acts 11:1-2). The cultural presuppositions were so engrained that the conflict endured even after the official verdict of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The tension is exemplified in Peter’s continuing struggle and Paul’s rebuke in Gal 2:11-14.

The divide continued to widen between the Judaizers, the “men from James” (Gal 2:12) who emphasized Gentile obedience to the Law, and the more Hellenistic Jews like Paul that viewed the law completely fulfilled in Jesus and therefore nonbinding to the Gentiles. The Judaizers viewed Jesus as Messiah to the Jews alone. While they agreed that Gentiles were welcome to follow the Jewish Messiah, to do so required submission to the Law of Moses, at least the portions they emphasized (i.e. circumcision and food laws). Mission as defined by the Judaizers was to enlarge the kingdom of Israel under the kingship of Messiah. In contrast, Paul’s view of mission was glaringly divergent. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses which had served its purpose of pointing to Messiah. For Paul, righteousness was defined as one’s right-standing or covenant membership with God which was available through Jesus, “the culmination of the law” (Rom 10:4). Paul viewed Jesus’ commission as a sending of his

60 See Gal 1:6-7, 5:12; 6:12-13; Phil 3:2, and 1Tim 4:1-3.
63 When Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the Law, he used the world πληρόωσι (Mt 5:17, Luke 24:44). This is the same word that Paul uses when a debt is paid in full (Rom 13:8-10).
people, both Jews and Gentiles, into all nations with the message that it is through Jesus alone that God has fulfilled his primary and eternal purpose, originally revealed in his promise to Abraham, and is now inviting all people into the kingdom of God. Jesus is the one specific descendant of Abraham who brings blessing to Israel and all nations (Gal 3:6-9,16).\textsuperscript{65} Jesus fulfilled (completed) the temporary Mosaic covenant and has now begun the new and eternal covenant originally promised to Abraham and prophesied by Jeremiah and Zechariah.\textsuperscript{66} Jesus did not merely extend the old covenant of Moses to include Gentiles, he completed and fulfilled it. In Jesus, a new and greater covenant was introduced.\textsuperscript{67} Jesus was greater than the temple (Mt 12:6), greater than Abraham (Jn 8:58), greater than Moses (Heb 3:3), greater than David (Luke 1:30-33, Acts 2:34-36), greater than Solomon (Mt 12:42), greater than Jonah (Lk 11:32), greater than creation (Heb 11:11), and greater than the Enemy and the powers of this world (Jn 12:31-32, 16:33; 1 Jn 4:4). Jesus is the agent of God’s forgiveness and therefore even greater than the need for the Temple sacrifice (Rom 3:22-25). For the New Testament writers, Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the conditional and temporary Mosaic covenant to the Jewish people, he is also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant that extended to \textit{everyone} (Matt 5:17).\textsuperscript{68}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Richard Bauckham, \textit{Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 32-33.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Jeremiah 31:31-34; Zech 9:11. This is the covenant that Jesus referred to in Luke 22:20, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”
\item \textsuperscript{67} Andy Stanley, \textit{Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 85 (Kindle).
\item \textsuperscript{68} Paul contrasts the universal nature of the Abrahamic covenant with the temporary and specific nature of the Mosaic covenant in Galatians 3:16-29. Wright states, “Once you understand how the story works, the great covenant story from Abraham to the Messiah, you can see (a) that the Torah was a necessary, God-given thing, with its own proper role within that story, and (b) that the God-given role of Torah has now come to a proper and honourable end – not that there was anything ‘wrong’ with it, but that it was never designed to be permanent.” N.T. Wright, \textit{Paul and the Faithfulness of God}, 862 (Kindle).
\end{itemize}
Matthew’s Gospel frames the entire story of Jesus in his identification as a descendant of Abraham. He begins with Jesus as the “son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt 1:1-2) and concludes the story by echoing God’s promise to Abraham in his commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19-20). Matthew’s genealogy connects the whole Old Testament story to that of Jesus. He is the descendant of Abraham that fulfills the principal promise and purpose for God’s set-apart people. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah for the Gentiles along with the Jews. It is through Jesus that God’s blessing will at last reach the nations through the obedience and disciple-making of Jesus’ followers through the power of the Spirit. Similarly, Paul concludes that as followers of Christ “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Jesus’ kingdom comprises people of all nations. And though Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was recognized and endorsed by the other Apostles (Gal 2:9), the Judaizers’ message would continually endanger the spread of the gospel leading to the continual threat to Paul’s life and his many years in prison.

The Rise of Christendom

While the ancient Jewish people struggled to live out their calling as a people of blessing, the early generations of the church understood God’s promise to Abraham as central to the idea of mission. Several passages were significant to their understanding of God’s plan to incorporate the Gentiles, especially the latter chapters of Isaiah used extensively by Paul. For example, Paul utilized Isaiah for language pertaining to Christ’s reign:

69 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 33.
70 Ibid, 47.
71 Ibid, 32.
The missional purpose for which YHWH makes himself known in the Old Testament parallels that of the New Testament in that all peoples of the earth will acknowledge and worship the one true God. 72

As a theology of mission developed, it was far from unified. Yet in the midst of their persecuted commitment to Jesus alone as King, Christianity exploded throughout Rome and into the forgotten East. 73 Common to church history is a concentration on the theological defenses against heresy, but Christians were influencing Roman culture in every level of society. 74 Archaeological evidence demonstrates that within a few decades, Jesus was being widely worshipped as Savior from Jerusalem to as far as Pompeii. 75 Their faith was compelling as followers of Jesus sacrificed their lives in their resolve to worship Jesus instead of Caesar leading to their meeting the needs of the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and even their persecutors. Their joy in the midst of persecution, the sacrificial acts of hospitality, and love that bridged

72 Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 39-41. This also parallels Jesus’ regarding the Shema (Deut 6:4-6) as the greatest of the commandments in Mk 12:29-31 and parallel passages. This is the entire focus of Ch.4 entitled “Jesus is Lord” by Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016) (Kindle).


75 Green, 105 (Kindle).
racial and socio-economic divisions were unparalleled in the ancient world. By the time of Constantine, some 10 percent of the entire Roman population already considered themselves Christian. Although the biblical record of the spread of Christianity is limited to the accounts in the Mediterranean basin, early Christianity navigated a multi-directional spread of the faith. Eusebius chronicled the introduction of Christianity in Egypt through the works of Mark, “Barnabas’ nephew.” “Parthia… was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor, Scythia to Andrew, and Asia to John, who, after he had lived some time there, died at Ephesus. Peter appears to have preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia to the Jews of the dispersion.” Tertullian explained how the Christian faith spread with such power by “…our care for the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another!’” In A.D. 112, the pagan Governor Pliny of Bithynia wrote to Emperor Trajan that Christians in his province could be found in every social strata. By 180 CE, the same could be said in every province of the Roman Empire, and within the first millennium of Christianity, the gospel had spread westward as far as Spain and Ireland in the west, Scandinavia and Russia in the north, southward to Ethiopia, and

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76 Green, 138-145 (Kindle). Smither, 1 (Kindle).
77 Smither, 2.
79 Ibid, 125.
80 Tertullian, Apologeticum, 39.7.
81 Smither, 1 (Kindle).
eastward to India and China. Within two hundred years, the church had grown from as few as twenty-five thousand to the millions.

With Constantine’s Edict of Toleration in 312 CE, the status of Christianity was legitimized leading to a fundamental shift in the conventional understanding of kingdom and mission. Christianity became the religion of the State when his successor, Emperor Theodosius, formally instituted a centralized church system based in Rome to unite and rule all Christians under one state-controlled institution. The marriage of church and state through the establishment of Christendom radically altered the Church’s understanding of its purpose in God’s kingdom since all Roman citizens were now considered “in.” Christianity quickly changed from a minority religion of servants and martyrs to one identified with the political power structures in the world. The impact between church and state was reciprocal as the church incorporated the values of empire, namely power, politics, and triumphalism leading to the State’s reliance on forced conversion to guarantee its dominance of power. Christendom moved the church from the margins of society to its center by creating a Christian culture that disconnected faith from other aspects of life. Ordained clergy became the authority in all faith-related matters while the laity were relegated to a largely passive role. Increasingly large and ornate buildings were constructed requiring the imposition of obligatory tithes based on the OT temple system to fund the structures of Christendom. Defining a proper “orthodoxy” as the norm

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84 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 52.
85 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 52 (Kindle).
86 Moreau, Introducing World Missions, 186.
for belief and practice was also controlled by the clergy. This shift to the center of society was thoroughly paradigmatic and revolutionized the trajectory of Christianity. Brueggemann symbolizes this revolution by contrasting Martin Luther’s understanding of a “Theology of Glory” with a “Theology of the Cross.” Rather than emphasizing Jesus’ sacrifice, suffering, and weakness as exemplified in the “Theology of the Cross,” a “Theology of Glory” lauds power, prosperity, and influence. This “Theology of Glory” is the consistent mark of Christendom and has continued to influence the Western church up to the present day.

Until Christendom, the biblical narrative of God’s people was rarely the dominant metanarrative in its world. Whether opposing the powers of Pharaoh, the Ancient Near East, Babylon, or Rome, the story of God’s people was often inconsiderable in comparison. Although a thorough investigation of the historical and theological development of mission and kingdom is beyond the scope of this study, Christianity in the twenty-first century appears to be reverting back to the marginalized posture of its foundation. The Western church has suddenly found itself surrounded by a foreign, even hostile culture that poses unique resemblance to that of the first century; namely moral relativism and religious pluralism, unfamiliarity concerning the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, dismissal of Christian values, rejection of objectivity and any assertion of absolute truth, and a basic distrust of Christian leaders. There is much for the Western church to learn from the early church’s approach to mission, especially in reference to

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89 Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 103.
90 Green, 41 (Kindle).
the microchurch model. To do that, it will be helpful to trace the path of the West’s rapid rejection of Christendom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What will likely become evident is how Western Christianity, though not ubiquitous, developed a theology of mission that looks considerably different from that of the pre-Christendom church and instead parallels the theology of the Judaizers who opposed Paul (Acts 15:5, Gal 2:14).

**Christendom’s Weakening Hold**

Many factors have contributed to the current environment in which Christendom lost its hold in the West. The Reformation of the sixteenth century afforded permission for the laity to question the church. This provided an atmosphere through which the Enlightenment ideals of individualism and reason could proliferate in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries culminating in violent segregations of power, as exemplified by the French Revolution. In Europe more than America, religion was linked to coercion and the seizing of authority. Americans were spared the early religious divisiveness and thus the religious wars that had ravaged Europe. In the wake of Jonathan Edwards’ preaching and the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, Americans conceived the unique idea that authority would no longer be unilaterally based in a king, but instead in an assembly of “We the People” sparking a democratic revolution that was no longer obligated to absolute authority by the State or the Church.


92 Ibid, 529.

93 Ibid, 197-198.
Nineteenth Century: Widening Disparity

The nineteenth century witnessed the increasing disparity between the religious and irreligious culture. Simultaneously, there was a substantial rise in agnosticism and secularism while correspondingly a rise in church involvement. Increasing anthropocentrism and revolutionary scientific discovery strengthened the ever-expanding secular culture, yet a surge of religious piety resulted from increased technologies in communication and travel alongside a renewed commitment by churches to regain lost terrain. The United States experienced its “Second Awakening” that emphasized personal religious experience and evangelism which lessened the sway of Rationalism and Deism.\textsuperscript{94} Yet, as scientific discoveries cast increasing doubt on the biblical narrative, “facts” continued to win out over traditional, authoritative belief, especially in scholarship. The tension between the religious and secular disparity was further provoked when Darwin published his \textit{Origin of Species} in 1859 emphasizing the continual progression of nature. Darwin’s influence on all other sciences and social structures cannot be understated in its aim of the advancement of human progress.\textsuperscript{95}

Twentieth Century: A Tension of Kingdoms

In the early twentieth century, one of the most popular missionary texts was Jesus’ words in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” For much of the church’s understanding, full and abundant life was interpreted through a colonial worldview in which Westerners were tasked with bettering the less-developed world through the culture and

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 322-323.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, 326-327.
technology that Western education, medicine, and agriculture could provide. Outside the missionary culture, this was deemed arrogant and further distrust developed between the church and scholarship. As higher criticism cast increasing doubt on the veracity of events recorded in Scripture, Protestants who defended the Bible felt besieged. Denominations began merging towards one of two poles: Fundamentalism which emphasized a pre-science view of Scripture, and Liberalism’s emphasis on the employment of modern science and philosophy in the study of the Scriptures.

From a social perspective, the separation was equally stark. Those embracing Fundamentalism often assumed a defensive posture that emphasized separation from culture and education. This resulted in being viewed as obscurant and judgmental by the liberal Protestants who embraced education and the advancement of social causes like Prohibition. Denominationalism was at its peak during the mid-twentieth century offering all kinds of “cradle to grave programs” led by new ministry specialists including Associate Pastors, Executive Pastors, Youth Pastors, Children’s Pastors, and various Program Directors that fueled consumerist appetites of Western Christians while reinforcing the separation of clergy and laity.

Albrecht Ritschl was foundational in circulating the liberal idea of the Kingdom-mission as one of living out Jesus’ love and goodwill in the world. Ritschl defined God’s Kingdom as the

96 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.1257 (Kindle). Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 97.
ultimate ambition to create a society of “ethical activity motivated by love” attained through the ongoing activity of God’s people. The Kingdom was inherently separate from any chosen people or place and instead was defined by the activities of the church when its moral choices and lifestyles reflected God’s own moral character. This understanding was foundational to liberal ideology in the first half of the twentieth century and eventually led to William Adams Brown’s conclusion that Jesus’ idea of the Kingdom was to create a society which reflected the characteristics of Jesus’ own relationship with God. In other words, the Kingdom is a present reality as the world incrementally and continually progresses towards God’s image of what a society should look like. For Brown, the Kingdom was separate from the person of Jesus (who he was) and revolved around the example of Jesus (what he did). This view was branded a “social gospel” through the influence of Walter Rauschenbusch, a New York City pastor and theologian who determined a “Christianity that did not transform society for the good was not what Jesus had in mind.” He emphasized political involvement and legislation as God’s kingdom solution for solving prevalent social ills as the alternative to the “individualistic gospel” that “has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion.” Similar to Ritschl, Rauschenbusch defined the Kingdom of God not as a people, but as the supreme purposes of God’s morality and ethics in a society. The mission of the kingdom was limited to the actualization of justice and social equality. Consequently, though the eschatological perspective

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100 Ibid, 36.
101 The King Jesus Gospel, 218 (Kindle).
of the Kingdom was not denied, for proponents of the social gospel of the early twentieth century, it was a mystery that could not be known.\textsuperscript{103} Instead, any attempt to define God’s kingdom or its mission was inherently restricted to what could be known—that which is tangible, anthropocentric, and naturalistic. The social gospel was increasingly wedded to the Darwinian theory of evolution and natural selection’s focus upon efficiency and pragmatism.\textsuperscript{104} Contrasting liberalism, C.H. Dodd offered the final blow in the 1930s to any eschatological kingdom expectation when he proposed his “realized eschatology” which understood the Kingdom of God solely in the life and ministry of Jesus and suggested that any work towards a future Kingdom was unnecessary and futile.\textsuperscript{105} So while liberalism was focused upon making this world better and Dodd was focused on Christology, neither offered any hope of a restored New Creation.

The rising emphasis in early twentieth century scholarship on the immanence of the kingdom began to permeate the local church, infiltrating even the Fundamentalist understanding of God’s purpose and mission. The necessity and importance of personal redemption from sin was united with the magnitude of overcoming the societal sins of systemic injustice. Cries came even from more fundamental churches to pursue justice, peace, equality, economic parity, and civil rights. For many churches, the pendulum was shifting from a posture of separation and a mission of personal salvation to one of complete involvement in and dependence upon the government and other social systems to live out the Kingdom-life.\textsuperscript{106} Churches were adapting to Modernity by becoming thoroughly Modern themselves. This is aptly illustrated in Adolf

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\textsuperscript{103} Harper, “KOG in the Theology of George Ladd,” 39.
\textsuperscript{105} Harper, “KOG in the Theology of George Ladd,” 41-44.
\textsuperscript{106} McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 219.
\end{flushright}
Harnack’s *What is Christianity?* where he reduces the Kingdom of God to the infinite, yet obscure value of the human soul and the commandment to love.\(^{107}\) Similarly, the Dutch theologian-politician Abraham Kuyper introduced the idea of using politics to shape and direct culture towards the morals and ethics of Christianity. The aim was to bring “common grace” of the Kingdom to all in a society, a view with significantly different consequences depending upon whether or not the majority of the culture is influenced by Christianity.\(^{108}\) An irreconcilable tension was brewing between two divergent views of God’s Kingdom—was God’s kingdom present or future?

In terms of the kingdom, there seemed little connection between theology and mission. Theology defined what God was like—what God said and did. Mission defined what people did for God.\(^{109}\) Theology referenced who God is and what God does locally, here in this place. Mission was what God’s people, like William Carey, did for God “over there.” The separation of these two ideas significantly impacted American ecclesiology. Churches preached theological messages for their congregations to think about God. Then churches would offer separate programs, called mission, to do something for God elsewhere. Churches that were theologically focused often referred to themselves as “going deep,” while ignoring the injustice in their own communities. Churches that focused on mission would often resort to activities that the deeper churches considered “shallow” and less theological.

In response to the various dichotomies of “here vs. there” and “now vs. then,” the mid-twentieth century observed a major shift from both theological extremes. Reacting to the over-

\(^{107}\) Ibid, 215.
\(^{108}\) Ibid.
imminent interpretations of the social gospel, neo-orthodox theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth began suggesting that the kingdom of God was separate from human societal structures. Instead, the kingdom was understood as an eternal order out of reach of human comprehension. Any human perception of the kingdom could only be possible through God’s direct revelation (i.e. incarnation, resurrection) in the present. Yet, this revelation could only be perceived through the eyes of faith pointing to God’s future eschatological world that, when consummated, constitutes the end of history.\textsuperscript{110} In this view, any revelation of the kingdom always points to the eternal, future Kingdom and not human society. Therefore, the church is not responsible to “heal the world,” solve society’s ills, or bring God’s kingdom to earth, but instead exists as witnesses, disciples, and servants of Jesus in the midst of the world.\textsuperscript{111}

While these neo-orthodox theologians were challenging the reigning view of liberalism, a variety of Fundamentalists also began breaking from the ranks and calling for the church to engage culture in the present with an expectant anticipation for the kingdom’s future realization. Carl Henry was one of the most prominent voices in his \textit{The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism} (1947). Henry’s approach to the Kingdom included elements of both Kuyper and Harnack—that the Kingdom includes God’s rule in the world (common grace) along with God’s personal reign in the heart and soul of individuals. In addition, Henry was also convinced that the full manifestation of God’s kingdom was still to come. This idea was further popularized by George Ladd’s \textit{A Theology of the New Testament}\textsuperscript{112} and became widespread in denominations and churches through the preaching of the evangelist Billy Graham. Ladd’s redefining of God’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid, 55.
\bibitem{McKnight} McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 219.
\end{thebibliography}
kingdom as “both here and not yet” became the mantra of twentieth century evangelicalism.

Ladd states:

The Kingdom of God belongs to The Age to Come and will be realized in its fulness only in that Age…. However, we have discovered that the transition from This Age to The Age to Come will not occur at a single point. We found there was an overlapping between This Age and The Age to Come.\textsuperscript{113}

Similar to the views of the early twentieth-century, Ladd affirmed that the church was not the kingdom. Instead, “the church is the community of the kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus’ disciples… are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of women and men.”\textsuperscript{114} This distinction of Kingdom as a rule or reign of God became the prominent influence in both scholarship and much of the church. It introduced an intangible nature to God’s Kingdom. In contrast to the Jewish understanding of kingdom being a people living in a literal place under the authority and protection of a king, the kingdom was now understood as God’s rule of redemption in the world. In other words, God’s kingdom is everywhere that God’s will appears in redemptive moments of salvation, restoration, reconciliation, and healing.\textsuperscript{115}

Ladd’s views eventually led to a widespread rejection of Fundamentalism’s extremes, not just doctrinally but also in the posture of separation with all who disagree in the non-essentials. Soon, loud voices rose up against Fundamentalism’s separation from culture, of which no voice was louder than Carl F.H. Henry’s formidable call to recognize and address social ills.\textsuperscript{116} A new

\textsuperscript{113} Ladd, \textit{A Theology of the NT}, 40. See John A D’Elia, \textit{A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) for a recent fair, yet revealing biography of George Ladd.

\textsuperscript{114} Ladd, \textit{Theology of the NT}, 109.

\textsuperscript{115} McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 13-15.

\textsuperscript{116} Harper, “KOG in the Theology of George Ladd,” 90.
tribe of Evangelicals influenced by Henry emerged uniting similarly-minded people of various denominations who were creating fresh opportunities to share the gospel through fervent engagement with culture. This new spirit of working within the culture caused a further diminution of Fundamentalist influence as they were put on the defensive and grew even more adamant in their calls for separation.117

The Incomplete Evangelical Mission

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of mission activity throughout the world from American-based Evangelical churches and denominations. This activity was typically based on two very distinct theological patterns: 1) A “now and not yet” understanding of the kingdom, and 2) The proliferation of American culture and values as integral to the missionary endeavor. The scientific and technological advances in the West offered unparalleled advantages over other societies and in “most cases there was no attempt to distinguish between religious and cultural supremacy.”118 American churches and denominations often sought to meet societal needs with the intention of building bridges to share a gospel shackled to Western values, especially the notion of a personal salvation emphasizing individualism over communal aspects of faith.119 The success of missions was often measured by

117 Ibid, 96.
119 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, loc.2412 (Kindle).
the numbers of those converted through articulation of a “sinner’s prayer” and baptism rather than by disciples making successive generations of disciples.\textsuperscript{120}

This evangelical paradigm was a derivation of Western Christendom. McKnight summarizes this characteristically Western version of God’s missional story through the acrostic “C-F-R-C” – Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.\textsuperscript{121} While this version of the gospel is true, it is not complete in that it lacks the critical component of God’s kingdom and mission. The C-F-R-C story correctly begins in Genesis 1-3 with Creation, including the purpose of humanity and the Fall. Regrettably, this version of the story then basically skips the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures and proceeds directly to the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus’ crucifixion for the redemption of humanity. God’s work through the people of Abraham is little more than the backdrop for Jesus. Consequently, this version of the story disregards the purpose of God’s people as a kingdom-community to instead focus on individual and personal salvation. While correctly centering the gospel in Jesus, the C-F-R-C story neglects the significance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who fulfills the Jewish story of Abraham, Moses, David, the Exile, and the Prophets.”\textsuperscript{122} As Paul describes in 1 Cor.15:3-5,\textsuperscript{123} the story of Jesus is the story of the culmination of the Hebrew Scriptures, an inherently incomplete story that is always, though

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Ibid, loc.2290 (Kindle). Paul’s directive to Timothy conveys the heart of generational discipleship – “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” 2Tim 2:2.
\item[121] McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 23 (Kindle).
\item[122] McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 25 (Kindle).
\item[123] 1 Cor.15:3-5 is Paul’s undertaking to sift out everything that is not essential to the gospel. He states, “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve” (emphasis added).
\end{footnotes}
unknowingly, pointing towards Jesus.\textsuperscript{124} Wright emphasizes that “the great story of the Hebrew scriptures was therefore inevitably read in the second-temple period as a story in search of a conclusion.”\textsuperscript{125} Jesus did not merely come to bring a new salvation to the world. His coming was the fulfillment of the entire biblical story that began at creation with God’s desire to partner with humanity through his delegated authority as stewards of creation. Even in spite of the Fall, God continued to pursue humanity, seen through his covenant with Noah and then the descendants of Abraham. The intention was always an invitation for humanity to be restored as God’s kingdom citizens—God’s kingdom on earth. The evangelical C-F-R-C story is incomplete because it does not depend upon God’s continual working in and through his kingdom people, but instead focuses upon forgiveness of one’s sin through Jesus’ offer of personal redemption. Summarizing its main areas of weakness, C-F-R-C neglects the essential invitation into a community and largely ignores the story of God’s journey with and through Abraham’s descendants before the birth of Jesus, the Christ.\textsuperscript{126}

Along with the perpetuation of the C-F-R-C story, the latter half of the twentieth century also witnessed a fusion in defining the terms kingdom and mission. The church struggled to find its identity in a society quickly progressing from Modernity’s confidence in Foundationalism, Rationalism, and Empiricism to a postmodern paradigm suspicious of all metanarratives as little more than oppressive attempts to universalize values and cultural norms while delegitimizing

cultural and individual differences. This is an ongoing cultural shift resulting in a period of deep uncertainty within the Western church. Postmodernism is weakening the influence of Enlightenment ideals, especially individualism and rationalism, that have contributed to the disastrous outcomes of isolation, heteronomy, and an unwillingness to allow others to challenge one’s beliefs. This postmodern transition has created significant tension within the culture of the church. Challenges to racial and socio-economic divisions that initially appeared within fringe movements of the church were slowly and unexpectedly embraced by mainstream churches calling for racial equality and justice for the poor and marginalized. The change has been much slower than the surrounding culture and the church has progressively lost its position of privilege and influence within Western culture. Missionaries that were once welcomed as representatives of powerful Western nations are now facing hostility as unwelcome foreigners. Contrasting the growth seen in the twentieth century, the twenty-first century has seen the decline of church attendance and financial contributions that are necessary to “do church” as it had been done in the past. This has forced churches and denominations to cooperate together, especially concerning missions.

The church’s patterns of transition in the latter part of the twentieth century can be traced through the world missionary conferences of the twentieth century. Ignited from an early

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127 Ibid, 6, 98.
128 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 8488 (Kindle). In ch.10 “The Emergence of the Postmodern Paradigm,” Bosch details how the end of the Modern era of Rationalism and Individualism are creating a distrust of the objectivity and a reliance on interdependence.
129 Ibid, 8799 (Kindle).
130 Ibid, 8838.
131 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, loc 8846 (Kindle).
132 Ibid loc 8946 (Kindle).
twentieth-century absence of missionary enthusiasm, theological questions were raised concerning the relationship between the church, mission, and kingdom. The distinction between “Christian” (i.e. Western nations) and “non-Christian” (non-Western nations) was abandoned as what were once the “sending nations” of Europe and the United States were suddenly considered mission fields themselves. For the first time since the Enlightenment, the church and its mission were viewed as theologically and pragmatically inseparable, though there was still debate concerning how the church related to the kingdom. While seemingly imperceptible at the time, the 1950’s produced a shift in emphasis from a church-centered mission to a mission-centered church. There was a fresh recognition that the church was neither the starting point nor the goal of mission, but that it extended from God’s character, the missio Dei.\footnote{Ibid, loc 8969 (Kindle).} The Church was being freshly understood as the one sent by Christ to fulfill God’s mission. What slowly began to develop was the deemphasizing of the professional clergy and a gradual awakening of a new paradigm where all in the Christian community exist as missionaries.

A More Comprehensive Story

Although Ladd’s “now and not yet” language remained influential in Evangelicalism, it began to dwindle alongside the increasing unity in the theological understanding of mission and kingdom.\footnote{Kim Kirsteen, “Mission Theology of the Church,” Intl Review of Mission 99, no.1 (April 2010), 43.} Rather than “kingdom” reflecting God’s spiritual reign in the individual, “kingdom” was being “discussed in terms of relationship between the church and the Trinity.” The church was understood as the anticipation of God’s future kingdom in the present with an emphasis on its role as the tangible, bodily presence of Christ in the world through the movement of the
Spirit. McKnight proposes that the twentieth century C-F-R-C story would be better viewed as the essential themes of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation in the much larger kingdom story of Jesus.

McKnight suggests that the larger and more biblical story is the kingdom story of God as King. This story begins with God as both Creator and reigning King. His rule is a benevolent one where authority is delegated to humanity as co-regents under God’s ultimate authority. McKnight terms this “Plan A” as the original, desired plan of God. It was a plan that was quickly usurped when Adam and Eve betrayed the King to seize authority for themselves in their desire to rule as God—to be King. The Fall initiates the new story of humanity where Adam’s iconic sin is perpetually repeated in his descendants. It is a story retold time and again through the myriad of Old Testament stories chronicling the sinful choices of humanity. And though the consequence of that first couple’s sin was exile, God was not done with humanity. God selected Abraham through whom he would re-establish “Plan A,” one man with whom he would make a covenant of grace and through whom he would rule again through delegated authority. As the story of Abraham’s descendants developed into the nation of Israel, these descendants were God’s intended means of redemption to invite all nations into God’s kingdom through submission and worship of God, the King. Regardless of humanity’s failures, God everlastingly desires to share his rule with humanity. Unfortunately, ruling in submission to God’s reign was

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135 Ibid, 43.
136 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 27-28.
137 Genesis 1-12 is a chronicling of the perpetual story of humanity choosing to usurp God’s authority followed by God’s judgement and then his mercy. The story is illustrated in the following narratives: The Fall of Adam and Eve, Cain killing Abel, the Nephilim’s wickedness, the Flood narrative, and the Tower of Babel.
138 Gen 12, 15, and 17.
still not enough. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Jdg 21:25) until eventually the descendants of Abraham demanded the appointment of a human “king to lead us, such as all the other nations have” (1Sam 8:5).

McKnight suggests that this request for a human king like the other nations was the end, or at least the delay of “Plan A,” which can be summarized as follows: 1) God alone is King, 2) Humans are to rule together under God’s delegated authority, 3) Humans usurp God’s rule, and 4) God forgives the usurpers and forms a covenant with Abraham to rule as King and to invite the nations into the Kingdom of the king.139 The demand for a human king by God’s chosen people once again usurped God’s intent. God yielded and thus began the subordinate “Plan B” where God would no longer rule solely as king, but would instead continue ruling through a human king from the line of David. What emerges throughout the rest of the Old Testament story is a frustrating, “simmering undercurrent running through the whole narrative” that alleges 1) David was a good king, 2) the current kings are far less than David, and 3) the story looks forward to a new Davidic king even better than David.140 The story of Plan B is fleshed out and reiterated in the Chroniclers’ account of history, the Psalms, and the Prophets. But the story of a single human king was never intended to be the original story nor would it be the final story. God’s willingness to put a human king on the throne was an accommodation. As history has

139 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 29.
140 Ibid, 30. The Chronicler offers a glimpse of Plan B in the following representative statements: 1Chron 17:14 - “I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.” 28:5 - “Of all my sons—and the LORD has given me many—he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.” 2Chron 9:8 – “Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD your God. Because of the love of your God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever, he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness.” And 2Chron 13:8 - “And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hands of David’s descendants. You are indeed a vast army and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made to be your gods.”
proven, human kings inevitably mean dynasty and empire with the desire to rule as God. This was the quick reality of Plan B. Yet, the hope remained that one day, someday, the expected Davidic king would usher in a kingdom where God would reestablish Plan A and once again rule exclusively as king. “The idea of Israel’s god [once again] becoming King is to be seen within the context of the whole historical expectation of Israel.” Against all odds, this hope persevered through the Babylonian exile and return when the reality set in that God’s kingdom was still palpably incomplete and far short of expectation as God’s citizens were still ruled by pagan foreigners and still worshiping in an inferior temple. Nehemiah highlights this in his post-exilic statement,

But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.” (Neh 9:36-37)

The need to reverse the damage of 1 Samuel 8’s demand for a human king was enduring and desired with great longing. This was the vision Jesus ushered in and this is the vision of the Gospel writers—that that this new Davidic king has come to save God’s people from their present and continuing exile. In Jesus, especially as seen through the lens of resurrection, the end of exile was realized as YHWH returning to his people.

Therefore, as plan A depicted God’s rule as sole King over the Kingdom-community of co-regents and Plan B as God’s rule through David and his descendants, it is only through Jesus,

141 Wright, New Testament and People God, 303 (Kindle).
143 N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, loc 4950 (Kindle).
that the story returns to plan A.\textsuperscript{144} “The ‘God’ who has become human in Jesus is the God who, as he had always promised, was returning to claim his sovereignty over the whole world.”\textsuperscript{145} In Jesus, humanity witnessed the fulfillment of its original design. And in Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near (Lk 10:9). This is not the kingdom of Moses or Samuel or David or any other corruptible King or nation. This is the kingdom of God as it was before Israel and as it will be forever more. In Jesus, God once again establishes his divine rule in the world, “the one who is thus exalted to worldwide sovereignty after his suffering is the one who then sits on the second throne in heaven.”\textsuperscript{146} In Jesus, the entire story of the Hebrew Scriptures is fulfilled. In Jesus, the entire story of God is fulfilled. Jesus is the Messiah, the anticipated King. Jesus is the Son of God, a kingly title typically used for the Roman Emperor.\textsuperscript{147} God alone is King and God rules through King Jesus. Forgiveness is granted through King Jesus. The rule of Jesus has begun now and will be complete in the final kingdom. Jesus ruled through a cross and a resurrection that redefined, or at least clarified, what “God’s Kingdom” has always looked like. Jesus was the kingdom of God on earth. As Karl Barth affirms, “The kingdom of God is at hand’ means ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14),”\textsuperscript{148} and this King echoes the proclamations of the Old Testament prophets to include the Gentile nations who would join with the returning Jewish exiles.\textsuperscript{149} This is the meaning behind Jesus’ statement to his followers that

\textsuperscript{144} McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 33.
\textsuperscript{145} Wright, \textit{How God Became King}, 187.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 193.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 95.
\textsuperscript{148} Karl Barth, \textit{The Christian Life 2nd ed.} (NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 348.
\textsuperscript{149} Bauckham, \textit{Bible and Mission},72-73. See Is 2:2, 11:12, 43:5-6, 49:12, 49:22-23, 60:1-9, 66:20; Ps 17:3; Mic 4:1; Zech 8:7-8, 8:23.
“you are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden” (Mt 5:14). Zion stands as the highest of all the mountains so that all nations stream to her. Jesus and his disciples are the beacon to whom all shall come.\textsuperscript{150}

**Twenty-first Century: A Post-Christendom World**

In contrast to the methodology of mission in the nineteenth century through wide-spread revivals led by charismatic leaders, twentieth century mission expression centered on the local church building as the hub of Kingdom-activity. Worship services and Sunday School became the primary expressions of kingdom-life. Local mission was focused on invitations for outsiders to visit the church assembly where they could hear the gospel from professional clergy and hopefully respond.\textsuperscript{151} Any kind of cultural engagement was usually reserved for professional missionaries and evangelists who were funded “here,” but did their mission work “over there” to people separated from any ongoing relationship with those churches providing the funds.\textsuperscript{152}

This method proved insufficient in the latter quarter of the twentieth century with widespread rejection of organized religion, especially concerning its doctrines of social issues like marriage and divorce, sexuality, sexual identity, and scientific theories (i.e. evolution). In response to this turning away from the traditional church, new models of church began to emerge that emphasized the need to highlight the cultural relevance of God, Scripture, and spiritual expression in a culturally sensitive, even attractive way. This attractional model, often termed “seeker-sensitive,” was highly successful and led to a new wave of mega-churches attracting

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 73.
\textsuperscript{152} Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 339.
thousands of people who were dissatisfied with the traditional and rigid churches of their childhood. These churches became experts at marketing and utilizing technology to bring people into the church where they could hear and respond to the gospel. The result was Christendom’s longstanding partnership of church and state being replaced by a partnership between church and marketplace. “Success” was commonly defined by these entrepreneurial churches as effectively offering benefits to increasing numbers of seekers and believers as the fulfillment of Jesus’ command to go and make disciples.

While the growth of many megachurches often resulted from transfer growth of those leaving the traditional model, the seeker-sensitive movement was fueled by the desire to bring people to salvation, usually defined as “accepting Christ” by means of a “sinner’s prayer” followed by baptism. Unfortunately, the emphasis towards a change in allegiance from self to Jesus and his Kingdom was often not built into their system structures. Instead, success was often identified through quantitative measures such as worship attendance, increases in offerings, the number of baptism, and stories of life-transformation. The megachurch movement


155 In his valuable section on “Preaching for Commitment,” while Warren desires believers to experience their full participation in the kingdom, he succumbs to the notion that the mode of salvation is a “prayer of commitment.” Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 305.

156 Rick Warren emphasizes this point in his statement, “Any time someone says, “you can’t measure success by numbers,” my response is, “It all depends on what you’re counting!” If you’re counting marriages saved, lives transformed, broken people healed, unbelievers becoming worshipers of Jesus, and members being mobilized for ministry and missions, numbers are extremely important. They have eternal significance.” Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 52-53. Watson and Scalen defines this and the following three essential principles of the church growth movement that were foundational to the success of the megachurch in late twentieth and twenty-first century
influenced even the traditional church models, especially in its driving principle to contextualize preaching. Using technology and modern marketing techniques, attractional churches were catalysts for multitudes of churches to connect Scripture to the everyday lives of its attenders.\textsuperscript{157} As it functioned in an increasingly consumeristic American environment, local churches evolved into a competitive market by which attenders shop for the church which best meets their needs and offers the best spiritual services.\textsuperscript{158} A tension developed between the primacy of God and that of the consumer as churches invested immense resources to fashion a product that consistently met consumeristic preferences.\textsuperscript{159}

Although the attractional model marketed itself as new and innovative, the paradigm still continued the Christendom ecclesiology of the previous 1700 years. The church institution was still the center of the church’s identity and expression. Like all models in Christendom, the attractional model was only viable where little to no significant cultural shift was required in moving from outside to inside of the church.\textsuperscript{160} Unfortunately, as Western culture has separated itself farther and farther from Christianity, the American church is spending more and more money on fewer and fewer people who are interested in its product.\textsuperscript{161} Changes must be made. It is inappropriate for the church to be defined as an experience for people to attend. Success must

\textsuperscript{157} Watson and Scalen, “Dining with the Devil,” 177.


\textsuperscript{159} Watson and Scalen, “Dining with the Devil,” 175.

\textsuperscript{160} Hirsch, \textit{Defining Missional}, 22.

\textsuperscript{161} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 29 (Kindle).
be defined beyond involvement in church activities and personal acts of devotion. The concept of a kingdom community that exists for mission is still too often a foreign idea. Local churches often have little concept and few systems for sending members of their congregations into the world to fulfill the missional purpose for which they were created. And rarely are church members empowered to fulfill their mission outside the control of the church organization. Sanders recognizes this in *Underground Church* stating:

> Many people have ideas of what God might want them to do, something God has embedded into their hearts or heads that they would like to see changed, but they have just not been encouraged or equipped to do it. Christian empowerment means helping people hear the voice of God on a personal level. It is more about leading people into the genesis of their own Pentecost than it is about laying out some visionary master plan that moves them to action. In a very real sense, forms of leadership that instruct rather than empower are a threat to Spirit-empowered missionary engagement.\(^{162}\)

**Summary**

The objective of this chapter was to briefly examine the church’s historical interpretation of the kingdom and mission and how this has led to the current dilemma of its Western decline in influence. This contrasts the church of the first century, which sought to engage culture, despite persecution and suffering, and eventually changed the world. The explosion of Christianity in the first two centuries demonstrates that the mission of Christianity is most effective when it contrasts the power structures of the world. This becomes especially apparent when considering the consequences of seventeen hundred years of Christendom as the church partnered with and sometimes dominated the power structures of the surrounding culture. The results were

\(^{162}\) Sanders, *Underground Church*, 80.
destructive to Jesus’ commission to go and make disciples. As a result, the explosive multiplication witnessed in the first two centuries dwindled in the West.

Now, as the church transitions from Christendom to a post-Christendom world, an increasing number of publications affirms a renewed emphasis in the church’s original mission and purpose.163 This is an exciting development as local churches and denominations recalibrate their understanding of their missional purpose as a kingdom-community that closer resembles the first century church. A new paradigm is materializing that is affecting the missiological and ecclesiological trajectory of the local church in America. The microchurch is a product of this shift, alluding to the importance of the current study to vet the microchurch model. As each successive generation in the West tends towards Post-Christendom and secularism, alternative church models must be examined in order to reach the Millennials, Gen-Z, and succeeding generations. As Hirschman states, “Church and Christianity in America must examine and evaluate its reason for existence or it will become increasingly obscure and forfeit any role in influencing individuals and society as a whole.”164

163 Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form and Function are Redefining American Christianity,” v.
164 Ibid, 2.
CHAPTER 3 – A THEOLOGY OF MISSION

Introduction

The previous chapters summary of the church’s historic interpretation of kingdom and mission provides necessary context to define the terms of criteria by which the microchurch model can be assessed. The current chapter is divided in two sections: The first is an attempt to define the theology of Kingdom as it relates to mission. The objective of this section is to demonstrate that mission originates from the character of God, is antecedent to the church, and is the purpose of the church as the medium of mission to the world. Section two will then consider the inseparable relationship between missiology and ecclesiology, the mission and how it is lived out in the church. After contrasting the kingdom paradigm of Christendom against that of biblical theology, a variety of methodological questions will be offered as benchmarks by which to evaluate the microchurch model.

Defining a Theology of Kingdom as it Relates to Mission

As the Kingdom of God is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, so also is the mission of God. The story of Jesus is the story about his kingdom vision expressed through the story of the Bible. It is a story of God’s unending desire to partner with and delegate authority to humanity through Creation, Israel, Redemption, the Church, and the future eschatological Kingdom. This story is the Gospel. Understanding God’s missional character is key to understanding how followers of Jesus are to participate in that mission. Christopher Wright in his instrumental work The Mission of God states that the Bible does not just contain “a number of texts which happen to

165 McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel, 423 (Kindle.)
provide a rationale for missionary endeavor,” it also suggests that “the whole Bible is itself a ‘Missional” phenomenon.”166 The Bible is the product of and witness to God’s ultimate mission. It is the story of God’s working through God’s people to engage with God’s world for the sake of all of God’s creation. Hence, the story begins with God and what he desires to do. Carrying out the purpose of the kingdom is the definition of mission.167 This begs the question, “What is the purpose of the kingdom?”

Contrasting Western ideology, God’s kingdom was never about growing bigger churches. Instead, the church is a people who live out the ways of the Kingdom.168 Wright states, “Our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”169 In other words, the mission of the church flows from and participates in the already established mission of God. Mission starts with God. This is a fundamental and necessary shift in understanding that shapes talk about God (theology), the interpretation of Scripture (hermeneutics), and how faith is lived out in God’s kingdom-community (ecclesiology). Darrell Guder advises that all of Scripture should be read through the lens of a missional hermeneutic. Doing so “enables us to recognize in the scriptural testimony not only the content of our message, but the way in which that message is to be made known.”170

168 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 78.
169 Wright, Mission of God, 23.
A proper theology of kingdom and mission read through a proper hermeneutical lens leads to a church that actively lives out this mission. Interpretation always affects methodology.

Since a missional thrust is evident throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the implications for the church are nothing short of a reformation concerning how the kingdom-life is demonstrated. Instead of mission being just one of many tasks of the church, the common view of Christendom, churches must identify themselves by its mission as kingdom-communities pursuing and participating in the mission God has already established. Though churches are commonly expected to have a stated mission, a more correct statement is that God’s “mission has a church.”¹⁷¹ Followers of Christ are merely entering into God’s already established work that began in Genesis to reunite himself with fallen humanity in a renewed and restored partnership. Following Jesus is defined by “participation in what God is doing, and what God is doing is rescuing all creation from its enslavement and liberating it” to its original design.¹⁷²

The Character of God as the Source of Mission

Mission begins with the ineffable God who delights in making himself known.¹⁷³ The character of God as Trinity is the basis by which the church’s mission is understood. The heart of the Triune God is love binding together the three persons of the Holy Trinity and overflowing to all humanity and creation. God’s very nature is revealed throughout the Scriptures as the constant sending One who takes the initiative in creating, pursuing, and redeeming. Inherent to


¹⁷² Scot McKnight, Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoformity in the Church (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2019), 5.

God’s very being is the Father sending the Son, the Son sending the Spirit, and the Spirit sending the church. To participate in this missio Dei is to participate in the very life of God. The missio Dei, therefore, is the foundation of the church’s identity. As the “sent” people of God, the church is God’s kingdom-community through which God accomplishes his mission to the world. Any conversation concerning the missio ecclesiae, the mission of the church, must be founded is the missio Dei, God’s relentless invitation to humanity to participate as his people, under his authority, to join in his mission. This is where life and purpose is found as the church partners with God in his ongoing mission to invite the world into his kingdom family and reign together in partnership in God’s kingdom.

The biblical story of God’s mission is one that begins universally with Creation and promptly initiates a continually narrowing focus, always with the universal in mind. Creation quickly narrowed to Adam and Eve and the entire human race. The narrowing continued to one of Adam’s descendants, Noah. Several generations later, God again chose to narrow the scope to one of Noah’s descendants, Abram, through whom the bulk of the story would continue. But not all of Abraham’s children were chosen to be bearers of the blessing. Isaac was chosen, Ishmael was not. Then, among Isaac’s sons, Jacob (Israel) was chosen while Esau was not. As the story continued to progress, eventually Judah was the chosen tribe of Israel through whom David’s lineage would become focus. Among David’s descendants, the blessed remnant would become smaller and smaller until only one became the sole focus—Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the

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174 Newbigin, The Open Secret, loc.326 (Kindle).
entire story. For every narrowing of the story there was a reaffirmation that those chosen were the bearers, not the beneficiaries, of God’s blessing. Being chosen was always for the sake of all people to be invited as participants in God’s kingdom. While the temptation of the Fall is the constant desire to exploit this privilege for personal gain, from the very beginning, election has always been for the specific responsibility of mission others.

This responsibility of blessing and election underscores the notion that the church is not the sender, but the one sent. Though not operating as such throughout its history, the church was never the origin of the mission, but is the chosen instrument through which God’s purpose will be fulfilled. Mission is not an attribute of the church, but instead is an attribute of God as he works in the world. This is what Paul implied in his metaphor describing the church as the Body of Christ. The church is God’s tangible presence, chosen and filled with God’s Spirit to accomplish God’s will. Stated even more succinctly, the church exists because there is a mission, not vice versa. Moltmann suggests that the missional community of the church parallels the Trinity, that the “reciprocal interpenetration” of the love, activity, and shared common space of the church is analogous to that of the three persons of the Trinity. This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17 concerning the movement of the church towards unity, that “the community of the church derives from the coefficacy of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.”

177 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, loc.433 (Kindle).
178 Ibid, loc.436 (Kindle).
180 Rom 12:4-5; 1Cor 12:12-31; Eph 1:20-23, 4:16; and Col 1:18.
181 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, loc 471 (Kindle).
The Church lives out God’s mission dynamically through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the essence and power of mission; therefore, and as the “agent” of mission the church is completely dependent upon the Spirit for its very existence. Mission is literally joining the Spirit in the work that is already in progress. It is cooperating with the Spirit as God transforms people to create an ever-growing community that willingly offer their allegiance to Jesus and join him in his ongoing mission. This is the ongoing process of discipleship by which the church grows more and more into the likeness of Christ.  

Jesus’ entire ministry was one of laying down his life for others. As his Body, the Church does the same. Christoformity is a term coined by McKnight to explain the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, the image for which humanity was originally designed in Genesis 3. This is the objective of God’s mission (Rom 8:29). The motivation for this conformity is not coercion, but Christ’s example of love. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (Jn 13:15), therefore “as I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34). Because of what Christ has done, the appropriate “response is a willing participation in God’s self-revelation” and sacrifice as God originally intended. Therefore, the Church by definition is a co-worker alongside Jesus in his mission. The new kingdom inaugurated in the reconciling work of the living God through Christ gives birth through the Holy Spirit to the missional church. The Church is mission and participates in God’s mission because it cannot do otherwise. Mission is the very reason for its existence and therefore it is defined as the primary

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185 McKnight, Pastor Paul, 4.
locus of God’s work in Creation. This is Paul’s understanding of what it means to participate in the gospel. As Jesus did not consider his position with God to be used for his own advantage, so his followers are not to look to their own interests (Phil 2:1-11). This will cause his followers to “shine among them like stars in the sky” (Phil 2:15). Following Jesus is living out the gospel story for which humanity was created, a story that is to be nurtured through the church so that it can be told to and lived out in the world. It is a story defined through Christ’s birth (foregoing heaven), ministry (serving others), crucifixion (ultimate sacrifice), resurrection (new life), and future exaltation (reign).

The Kingdom’s Inseparable Relationship between Missiology and Ecclesiology

The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms defines “ecclesiology” in both description and purpose. It states:

ecclesiology. The area of theological study concerned with understanding the church (derived from the Greed word ekklesia, “church”). Ecclesiology seeks to set forth the nature and function of the church. It also investigates issues such as mission, ministry, and structure of the church, as well as its role in the overall plan of God.”

As fundamentally defined, mission and ecclesiology are inseparably united. While the previous section was concerned with mission as God’s specific plan, criterion must be established by which an evaluation can be made concerning what the microchurch is attempting to do. Stated in a different question, “How is success defined in the microchurch model and does that correspond to the mission as stated above?”

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187 McKnight, Pastor Paul, 107-109. See 1Cor 15:3-8; 2Tm 2:8.
The Kingdom is the objective of mission. Mission is the process and motivation that leads to God’s desire for his kingdom come and his will done on earth as it is in heaven. This section will begin by contrasting the two most influential interpretations of the Kingdom. From this overview, some normative principles concerning how the church lives out its citizenship as a people of God’s kingdom can then be considered, principles that extend beyond any one particular methodology. As these kingdom-principles are identified, they will be added to the list of benchmarks by which the microchurch model will be evaluated.

Considerable effort towards defining normative principles is reflected in Ralph Winter’s and Steven Hawthorne’s *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* originally published in 1981 and now in its fourth edition.\(^{189}\) Unfortunately, the appeal for change by the various contributors often remained in the seminaries and were slow to be applied to the local church. But in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, some very positive advances have been made through organizations like Exponential, the Verge network, and the Send Network of the Southern Baptist’s North American Mission Board.\(^{190}\) As new understandings of kingdom and mission are influencing pastors and denominational leaders, weaknesses in Christendom’s theology and methodology are being recognized leading to shifts back to a New Testament paradigm. Though a first century understanding of the kingdom was far from homogenous, there was unity in a few basic ideas concerning how the early church defined “gospel” as a missional


\(^{190}\) A variety of mission movements and organizations have been developed. These include: Exponential (www.exponential.net), the Verge Network (www.vergenetwork.org), the Send Network (www.namb.net/church-planting), 100 Movements (www.100movements.com), Acts 29 (www acts29.com), The Bonhoeffer Project (www.thebonhoefferproject.com), Forge America (www.forgeamerica.com), Mosaix Global Network (www.mosaix.info), NewChurches (www.newchurches.com), NewThing (www.newthing.org), Stadia (www.stadiachurchplanting.org).
kingdom inaugurated in Jesus coupled with an eager expectation for this kingdom to be fully realized in Jesus’ imminent return.\(^{191}\) This expectation of the kingdom’s full realization has ecclesiological implications concerning how the church lives out its kingdom mission prior to King Jesus’ return.

The Reformation’s Multiple Christendoms

Since the inauguration of Christendom in the fourth century, Western Christianity and Christendom have been largely synonymous. While the Reformation sought to end Catholic dominance, in its stead were multiple smaller expressions of Christendom that resulted from the various religious groups continuing to seek control of regional theology and government. Different cultures each had their own definition of Christendom that seemed to permeate, often violently, throughout the culture.\(^ {192}\) With the establishment of the New World, a culture of individual freedom was tied to an appetite for revolution that proliferated throughout the Western world allowing every faction of disagreement to dissolve into a seemingly unlimited number of denominations claiming their own small territorial versions of Christendom. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, the West quickly began moving into the present secular age, though Christianity in its multiplying forms still flourished for several additional centuries. The eventual abandonment of organized religion and the rejection of Christendom was noticeable first in Europe,\(^ {193}\) as churches began to sit empty and eventually becoming tourist attractions and even

\(^{191}\) Ladd, *A Theology of the NT*, 716-717.


\(^{193}\) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 111.
The United States was at least a generation behind this religious rejection with remnants of the various denominational clusters continuing to wield significant influence, including Evangelicals in the Bible Belt of the South, Catholic pockets throughout the North and Midwest, and Lutheran strongholds in the North Midwest. Yet, below the surface, the younger generations were following Europe’s course. By the turn of the twenty-first century, many U.S. denominations were in perpetual decline as the established church was at a loss in coping with an unfamiliar post-Christendom environment. The result of this radical secularization of Western culture has created an unfamiliar missionary situation for churches that previously enjoyed power and influence.

While a difficult transition, the paradigm shift away from Christendom may have benefit since God’s Kingdom, not Christendom, was the mission of Jesus. The heart of Christianity is appropriately defined in a “theology of the cross” that understands God’s greatest revelation was revealed through Christ’s suffering rather than power. As such, the weakness and suffering of Jesus’ followers is also the means through which Christ’s power is most effectively on display.

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198 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc. 43 (Kindle).
This is the opposite of Christendom.\textsuperscript{199} In Jesus’ upside-kingdom, conquest is secured by hanging on a cross.\textsuperscript{200} The history of Christendom is evidence of the tendency to distort Jesus’ original purpose for his church and to redefine Christianity as the utilization of power and influence.\textsuperscript{201} Even in non-violence, the history of Christendom has not commonly resulted in sacrificial allegiance to Jesus and the making of disciples, but instead on submission to church structures and a fixation upon one’s individual salvation.\textsuperscript{202} The diminishing influence of Christendom is leading to a renewed understanding of God as a missionary God and the church’s purpose and mission as a sent kingdom-people.\textsuperscript{203}

This paradigm shift, like all paradigm shifts, is an arduous one. Many local churches are closing their doors and many pastors and denominational leaders are finding themselves unemployable. With the alarming rate of exodus from churches, religious leaders are struggling to formulate and execute a response. The solution necessitates more than a mere change in approach, but a fundamental reformation in theology and organizational structures. The dilemma of the western church has resulted from a faulty ecclesiology that centers upon individualism, consumerism, and the antiquated pairing of Christendom and the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{204} The unfamiliar quandary of this new post-Christendom environment is forcing the Western church to discover anew the form and substance of what it means to be a participatory, disciple-

\textsuperscript{199} Mark A. Noll, \textit{A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Pub, 2019), 1038 (Scribd).

\textsuperscript{200} Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom,” 11.

\textsuperscript{201} As pursued by the Moral Majority, the Family Research Council, and the uprising of dominion theology (citation?).


\textsuperscript{203} Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form, and Function,” 4-5.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid, 137.
multiplying, missionary church that operates from the kingdom-qualities of weakness and humility. Paternalistic and inequitable missions as historically promoted by the West are no longer effective. Cooperation, humility, and submission to learn from Christian leaders in non-Western, non-Christendom, less prosperous environments are necessary. This emulates the position from which the New Testament speaks—sharing the gospel from a position of weakness and rejection.205

Weakness is the way of the cross. God’s victory is often hidden within what often seems to be the opposite of a king’s reign – suffering, tribulation, and persecution.206 It is within these qualities that love is demonstrated. This is where God empathizes with humanity. This begs the question of hope. Is their hope in the midst of weakness and suffering? The answer to this is resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection was the “manifestation of victory” and the “first-fruits” (1Cor.15:23) of a harvest that is still to come for all “in Christ.” Jesus’ resurrection promises the resurrection of his followers and will be the culmination of God’s work as all things finally come under his reign and rule. Christ’s appearances to his disciples were not merely to demonstrate that Jesus was alive. They were also the means by which Jesus pointed his disciples toward the promise of their own future resurrection. Jesus’ tangible, post-resurrection appearances are the assurance that victory has been won and that all the earth will submit to his reign.207 The hope of mission is nothing less than the completion of all God has begun to do in the creation of the

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206 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.535 (Kindle).
207 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.494 (Kindle).
world and of humankind. Thus, the hope is the fulfillment of God’s original design for humanity in Genesis 2-3.  

Benchmark for Kingdom Posture of Weakness

Benchmark 1: Does the microchurch operate from a hopeful position of weakness and submission verses paternalism and power?

The Mutual Relationship of Kingdom and Mission

In light of Christendom’s continual decline, the church is under compulsion to redefine itself in terms of kingdom and mission. Scott McKnight’s Kingdom Conspiracy distills these concepts into their most basic elements contrasting the two most common misconceptions of kingdom in the past century—the “redemptive dynamic” and that of social justice. While both ideas impart representative elements of the Kingdom, neither are complete expressions of it. The two differing yet complementary interpretations help provide a framework by which a more biblical concept of kingdom can be developed to serve as a standard of evaluating the microchurch model.

The “redemptive dynamic” is connected to George Ladd’s influence in the mid-twentieth century and limits the definition of kingdom to God’s act of redemption in the hearts of the redeemed and his rule over the redeemed. It is a dynamic located at the same time both nowhere and everywhere. Although it is not limited to a specific place, it exists everywhere redemption is occurring in the hearts of Jesus’ followers. Ladd’s position advocates a kingdom that is both present and future, and to the extent which it has been inaugurated, it can be realized in our

208 Ibid, loc.767 (Kindle).
209 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 13.
world. Through the incarnation and work of Christ in the world, the Kingdom has penetrated this world and to the degree that his Spirit is working in the world, the people of God can be transformed and made new. The partial presence of God’s Kingdom here and now is not the fully realized kingdom of the “not yet,” explaining why the citizens of the kingdom are not yet perfect, not yet fully loving, not yet fully holy, or fully peaceful. While Jesus’ followers have not fully been conformed to the image of Christ, the Spirit is continuing his present work of sanctification in an ever-flowing movement towards a transformation that will be perfectly completed when the Kingdom is fully realized.\(^{210}\) Ladd famously states,

> The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which *will* appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign.\(^{211}\)

As mentioned in chapter two, Ladd is quick to clarify that the church is *not* the Kingdom. “The church is the community of the Kingdom *but never the Kingdom itself*. Jesus’ disciples… are *not the Kingdom.*”\(^{212}\) John Bright agrees, “There is no tendency in the New Testament to identify the visible church with the Kingdom of God…. The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, *but the visible church is not that Kingdom.*”\(^{213}\) This is an important distinction that McKnight suggests does not fit with the story of the Bible. For any biblical writer, to speak of kingdom was to speak of Israel, nation, land, law, citizens, and a king.\(^{214}\)

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\(^{210}\) Ibid, 11.


\(^{212}\) Ibid, 109 (italics added).

\(^{213}\) Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, loc. 4535 and 6208 (Kindle).

\(^{214}\) McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 13.
The second contrasting misconception of God’s kingdom is its limitation to acts of social justice and good deeds done for the common good regardless of whether or not these deeds are done by citizens of the kingdom.\footnote{Ibid, 149.} The academic foundation of this idea originated through the writings and leadership of Walter Rauschenbusch, Jürgen Moltmann, and most radically in Gustavo Gutiérrez’ Liberation Theology.\footnote{See Rauschenbusch’s \textit{Christianity and the Social Crisis} (1907) and \textit{A Theology for the Social Gospel} (1917); Moltmann’s \textit{A Theology of Hope} (1993); and Gutiérrez’ \textit{A Theology of Liberation} (1971).} This idea has found a moderate and expanding twenty-first century expression through the non-violent, social activism of progressive Christians led by pastors and speakers such as Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo.\footnote{McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 251-2.} This growing approach emphasizes the good work of liberation for the oppressed and marginalized in a variety of contexts as the defining component of the Christian calling. At the risk of oversimplifying, this idea of kingdom has often sought change through the public sector where considerable energy and resources have been invested for the purpose of changing societal systems through political activism.\footnote{Ibid, 252.}

While conceding that both ideas of kingdom have much to offer the church and society, alone they each miss the mark. Ladd’s interpretation easily succumbs to the Modern tendency to minimize a corporate understanding of Kingdom for a subjective, individualistic gospel. Similarly, the social justice interpretation can easily accede too much dependence upon humanity’s societal and political systems while disregarding the necessity of the gospel of the Kingdom itself. McKnight suggests that any biblical talk of kingdom must comprise the church (citizens) reflecting the lordship of Christ (Israel’s king) through its action towards God and the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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\item Ladd, \textit{Kingdom and the Power of God}, 149.
\item Rauschenbusch, \textit{Christianity and the Social Crisis} (1907) and \textit{A Theology for the Social Gospel} (1917); Moltmann’s \textit{A Theology of Hope} (1993); and Gutiérrez’ \textit{A Theology of Liberation} (1971).
\item McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 251-2.
\item Ibid, 252.
\end{thebibliography}
world (nations).219 By definition, a kingdom is the physical rule of a king over their people and territory.220 While engaging the poor and correcting inequalities is part of what it means to be God’s agent in the world, the idea of God’s Kingdom should not be limited to works of social justice through societal systems and structures.221 While freeing the oppressed and aiding the marginalized are critical aspects of the Messiah’s role in the kingdom, the focus is not the oppressed, but the King who frees them. The good works of social justice are aspects of a kingdom that refer both to God’s rule and God’s reign over, among, and through his people.222

The New Testament’s contrast of Jewish and Gentile perspectives of the kingdom offers the benefit for a culturally relevant understanding today. Jesus framed his vision for Israel using the familiar concepts of “kingdom” as understood through the Hebrew Scriptures, yet used the term “disciple” as understood through first century Jewish and Hellenistic culture to refer to citizens of the kingdom.223 Similarly, Paul framed his understanding of Kingdom using the Greek term “church” (ekklesia) along with its citizens as “brothers and sisters” (adelphos).224 “Kingdom” and “Church” are terms used to describe the same concept to two distinct audiences. To contextualize this idea for the twenty first century, the concepts suggested by Ladd and Rauschenbusch should be blended through defining Kingdom as “God’s redemptive rule in the

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219 Ibid.
221 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc. 142 (Kindle).
223 The term “disciple” (μαθητής) is understood as “adherent,” “student,” learner,” or “follower” and though related to the Hebrew terms לֹאַדָּה and לֹאַדָּה with various models in the Old Testament, it also has characteristics that are distinctly Hellenistic. Timothy Friedrichsen, “Disciple(s) in the New Testament: Background, usage, characteristics and history,” Salesiannum 65 (2003), 718-719.
224 McKnight, Pastor Paul, 59 (Kindle).
lives of his people who live out their purpose as his representatives in the world.” The kingdom is not merely God’s intangible reign nor is it limited to a variety of good works and “Church” is not defined as a building, institution, event, or service. The kingdom and the church are the community of Christ-followers called to know God, submit to God, and live as his co-regents in the world, through the power of his Spirit, testifying and participating in the work of Christ.²²⁵

As referenced in chapter 2, the kingdom is the reestablishment of God’s original plan (Plan A).

The relationship between kingdom and mission must be articulated through the kingdom story of Scripture. In contrast to the previously mentioned C-F-R-C story that minimizes the story of Israel, the kingdom story is that of Jesus becoming the long-anticipated Jewish Messiah and King. Jesus is the story’s climax.²²⁶ In The New Testament and the People of God, Wright explains that God’s kingdom-story begins with Creation via God as King and ruler. God’s desire to partner with humanity, the only being created in God’s image, was thwarted in the human desire to rule as God. The consequences of such a choice were realized through death and separation, yet God’s love compelled him to pursue humanity and eventually offer restoration through his covenant with Abraham. Thus began the perpetual story of God’s chosen people rejecting his authority as King, suffering the devastating consequences, and experiencing the grace of God’s rescue and restoration as kingdom citizens. This continued until finally, Israel requested a king “like the other nations,”²²⁷ and despite the hopeful promise of King David and his descendants, continual failure eventually culminated in the Babylonian exile. But again, as a


²²⁷ 1 Samuel 8:5.
result of God’s overwhelming love and grace, there was a second Exodus. Though people expected this to usher in the Kingdom of God, it did not deliver. Wright explains,

The great story of the Hebrew scriptures was therefore inevitably read in the second-temple period as a story in search of a conclusion. This ending would have to incorporate the full liberation and redemption of Israel, an event which had not happened as long as Israel was being oppressed, a prisoner in her own land.228

The Hebrew Scriptures anticipated the ultimate fulfillment of God’s kingdom yet found none. The story provided seemingly vague pictures of what this hope and fulfillment would look like. It was only through Jesus that this hope and fulfillment were ultimately realized. He is the promised Messiah sent from God to rescue Israel and succeed where they failed. In Jesus, God alone is once again King. The kingdom-story is what Jesus alluded to when he said the “kingdom has drawn near.”229 God has redeemed his people and has restored the purpose of his people to be his ambassadors to the world.230 He is the fulfillment of the ancient picture of Messiah not only as king of Israel, but king of the whole world.231 Everyone who enters the story enters as a participant. While Jesus’ disciples struggled to understand Jesus’ teachings and parables concerning the Kingdom, and though they misunderstood the sacrificial and servant nature of his

228 Wright, The NT and the People of God, 216.
229 Matt. 4:17, 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9, 10:11, 21:31. McKnight offers 3 passages that reveal how those closest to Jesus thought Israel’s story was coming to its big moment. 1) Mary’s Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55), Zechariah’s prophecy (Lk 1:67-79), and John the Baptist’s call to repentance (Lk 3:1-18). McKnight states, “Each of these passages emerges breathtakingly from the messianic and kingdom expectations of Israel’s Story, each of these concentrates on the completion of those themes in the births of John and Jesus, and each of these announces a completely new state of affairs for Israel. In particular, they announce a community marked by justice, holiness, peace, and love — but this community is clearly the community that sits at the feet of Jesus.” McKnight, King Jesus Gospel, 1400 (Kindle).
230 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 27.
231 Wright, How God Became King, 171 (Kindle).
kingship, they rightly expected Jesus to rule God’s kingdom as God’s king. And as participants in the kingdom God, they submitted to King Jesus and invited others to do the same.\footnote{McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 36.}

The contrast between the approach and language of Jesus and Paul illustrates how the relationship between Kingdom and mission is contextual. Even the writer of John’s Gospel framed Jesus’ purpose in the Hellenistic concepts of \textit{abundant life, eternal life}, and the contrast of \textit{light} and \textit{darkness}. Jesus, Paul, and John each shaped their descriptions of the kingdom in terms of their context. In the same way, the concept of kingdom and mission today only works when it is tied to the context in which it is shared,\footnote{Ibid, 43.} and if theology is contextual, then certainly methodology is as well.\footnote{Ibid, 56.} In the same way the disciples lived out Jesus’ story as the fulfilment of the story of Israel, the twenty first century church must do the same. The kingdom of which Jesus speaks is a people governed by a king, and those who offer allegiance to King Jesus are citizens of that kingdom. The kingdom-mission is, therefore, living out the confession that Jesus is Lord of all and living as his tangible presence to invite all to “follow me.”\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{The Open Secret}, loc.232. McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 73.} The call of following Jesus in living out love, fostering justice, alleviating suffering, and living morally as citizens of his kingdom.\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{Open Secret}, loc.1249 (Kindle).} Mission is not just an extension or an enlarging of the church. It is much more costly and revolutionary. It unites the convicting and drawing actions of the Holy Spirit with the obedient participation of his people who live as the people of God. Using

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 36.}
\footnote{Ibid, 43.}
\footnote{Ibid, 56.}
\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{The Open Secret}, loc.232. McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 73.}
\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{Open Secret}, loc.1249 (Kindle).}
\end{footnotesize}
language and images that communicate to the surrounding culture, followers of King Jesus share their own authentic confession of Jesus as Lord while inviting others to participate with them.\(^{237}\)

In a society embedded in Christendom, relating to and communicating with the surrounding culture takes minimal effort compared to a post-Christendom society. In post-Christendom, new approaches must be developed to adequately communicate Jesus and his kingdom vision into a language people understand. In the same way Jesus sent his people through the power of the Holy Spirit to create a new kingdom society (a church society) of servants of God’s love, justice, peace, and holiness, he is doing the same today.\(^{238}\) The essence of Jesus’ kingdom-mission is being sent out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God’s praise and glory and to participate in the life of the world to shine the light of Jesus’ kingdom.\(^{239}\)

**Benchmark for Mutuality of Kingdom and Mission**

**Benchmark 2:** Does the microchurch model encourage decentralized empowerment for individual communities to determine how to best engage culture?

**The Medium of Mission**

The tendency in the West to separate church and mission has often led to an inability to live out the “sent-ness” of God’s purposes, both corporately and individually. While the Scriptures articulate the working out in history of God’s missional desire to bless all nations, the recent Western church’s telling of that story has seemed less concerned with God’s work in the world and instead intent to focus on its own eschatological desire to escape. Instead of running

\(^{237}\) Ibid, loc.819 (Kindle).

\(^{238}\) McKnight, *King Jesus Gospel*, loc.2442. (Kindle)

\(^{239}\) Buxton, *Dancing in the Dark*, loc.3872. (Kindle)
the race with aspiration to be a mobile hospital for the sick (Mk 2:17) or going into all the world to make disciples (Mt. 28:19-20), the church often resembles an insulated bunker that seeks separation from rather than a passion for the world. Amplifying this separation has been the American creation of a Christian subculture that bears a resemblance to the culture at large, yet in a manner that appears more like an irrelevant caricature. Instead of the church operating as God’s instrument to accomplish the purpose of the universal *missio Dei*, it instead has functioned as if the church itself is the objective of God’s mission. Western church models attempt to attract audiences to attend church programs with the expectation that it is the attender’s responsibility to conform to the culture of the church rather than the church being responsible for cultural context. This is antithetical to the biblical model which does not fixate on bringing people into the church gathering, but rather in taking the gospel of Jesus into the culture. The Western church has neglected the very purpose for which it exists. Instead of hopeful anticipation for the reconciliation of all things through Christ (Mt 19:28-30, Col 1:20), the singular concept of “going to heaven when you die” has become the central hope. Instead of pursuing conformity to the character of God for which humanity was originally designed to reflect, an image that was fully realized in Christ, the focus is often redirected towards proper procedures and methods that promise church growth. Rather than living out God’s original purpose for humanity as stewards of God’s will through his delegated authority, the American church has often

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240 Watson and Scalen, “Dining with the Devil,” 177.
242 See Rom 8:29; 1Cor 15:47-49; 2Cor 3:18, 4:4; Col 1:15,
emphasized a self-centered, success-oriented definition of what it means to be the church. If the microchurch model seeks to be a biblical expression of the church, it must correct this paradigm.

The modern American church has been so preoccupied with mission statements and mission activity in distant lands that it often mistakes these for a proper posture toward the non-Christian world. While many pastors and church leaders deeply desire to fulfill God’s purpose for their local church, the American church paradigm is flawed in its basic theological foundations and is becoming less and less effective even by its own definition of success.244 The prevalent church model typically views its implementation of mission in three distinct silos: 1) Defining local missions as helping those in need—such as serving the poor, involvement in foster care and adoption, and various other community ministries;245 2) Recognition of the mandate to reach the surrounding community (Jerusalem, Judea) and seeking to do so through an attractional “come and hear” approach where programs are created to pique the interest of those in the community and adequately motivate them to attend and “hear the gospel” and respond;246 and 3) The sending of professional missionaries to reach those in distant lands or of differing cultures (Samaria and the ends of the earth).247

In contrast, a missional community is defined by more than the meeting of needs by a few, offering spiritual services to consumers, or special offerings for missionaries of whom few in the church are familiar. The medium by which God’s mission is to be realized is the Spirit-filled church sent corporately and individually into the world, not merely as redeemers of culture

244 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 30 (Kindle).
245 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.1255 (Kindle).
246 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 312 (Kindle).
247 Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc 675 (Kindle).
who make better behaved citizens, but as witnesses pointing to Jesus through a dying of self that gives rise to resurrection life in Christ. In their book designed for pastors, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay define the church as “God’s people intentionally committing to die together so that others can find his kingdom.” In the same way Jesus offered his own life for others, his followers are asked to offer their lives for the sake of the world. Mission is patterned after Jesus’ posture towards the world vividly seen through his interaction with those considered “other”—sinners, the marginalized, Gentiles, Roman leaders, and the religious leaders. The Church is God’s strategy for the completion of his original purpose in Eden, God’s promise to Abraham to bless the world, and God’s covenant to Israel to be a light to the nations. The Church is the body of Christ living incarnationally in the world. It follows the pattern of Jesus as God in the flesh who came to live in and among the world with the invitation to join God’s family and follow Jesus through the power of the indwelling Spirit. As already stated, in the same way God sent his Son, so the Son sends the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church.

This everyday mission of “sent-ness” exposes the failure to define the church as attending and consuming the goods and services of the organized church. If the microchurch is to be a valid model and expression of the church, it must correct these missional flaws. It must present a missional community patterned after what God has done in Jesus Christ. This is not to assume that the goal is to replicate the first century model. The examples in the New Testament demonstrate how to fulfill the mission of reaching others using the most culturally effective

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248 Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, Exponential Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 47. (Kindle)
249 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, loc.440 (Kindle)
251 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, loc 9461 (Kindle).
methods available. This explains the success of the “come-and-hear” model so widely successful during the twentieth century since most in the West were products of a Judeo-Christian background. The culture’s attitude toward the church was typically positive. As postmodern philosophy has become more influential and the various financial and sexual failures of churches and leaders have eroded public trust, the methods and models through which the church reaches a twenty-first-century secular and religiously diverse culture must be amended. As faith-communities continue to participate in the mission of Christ in the world, each local church must also seek to go into its own local context using the gifts and passion of that particular local church body. No single local expression of mission is identical with another. The Spirit orchestrates the gifts, and passions, and personalities of each local expression of the kingdom community as the tangible presence of Jesus to the world, just as the Spirit speaks in the hearts of unbelievers constantly drawing them to Jesus. Participation in the mission of Christ must incorporate a willingness to come alongside others in whom the Holy Spirit is already working. Effective mission includes joining the Spirit in the work he has already begun. There is no template, but instead requires the church’s constant experimentation to create ever-changing models to continually adapt to the surrounding culture in order to be Jesus’ tangible presence within a community. This was the approach of the Apostle Paul who continually conformed how the gospel was communicated in each culture (1Cor 9:19-23).

Success is debatable depending upon how it is defined. If success means larger church gatherings, then the megachurch movement was highly debatable. If success is defined as numbers of people offering their allegiance to Jesus as their Lord and King and living out their faith individually and corporately, then the success of the American church in the late twentieth century is debatable.


Buxton, Dancing in the Dark, loc.4002 (Kindle).

Ibid, loc.4477 (Kindle).
Like any paradigm or worldview, evaluation requires examination against other perspectives. Mutual cooperation is necessary with followers of Christ who have different gifts, backgrounds, and beliefs. As Paul describes in Ephesians 4:11-12, Christ has called apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (APEST) to equip his people for ministry. These are the leaders of the church who raise up ministers, yet rarely are all five of these callings to be found in the Western church. Instead, churches typically focus on pastors, teachers, and entrepreneurs. For much of the twentieth century, Western church leaders supposed themselves experts with the right theology, the best strategies, and the most effective resources to export to the rest of the world. The church in the West has basically operated as a closed system limiting collaboration within its borders. And while the global church is seeing phenomenal growth, the American church remains stagnant and rarely seeks help from beyond itself. This is why the declining Western church should seek examples and mentors from churches in Africa, Asia, and South America where the church is multiplying exponentially under the leadership of all five APEST leaders. It is imperative that the American church allow its brothers and sisters from other cultures to help diagnose its own failures as a people called to live out God’s mission, rather than continuing as collection of loosely connected organizations that invite the unbelieving community to attend services while sending specialists out with the title of missionaries.

What must be altered is a missional theology that deems mission the call of every follower of Jesus. Every follower is a missionary. The church is called to be a family living out

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256 Roberts, Lessons from the East, 23.
257 Ibid.
their faith and sharing the Gospel together in the surrounding community.\textsuperscript{259} Mission is the church living out the prayer of Jesus, “Father, Holy is your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:9-10). The church is the anticipation of this prayer. While Jesus talked of the kingdom, the first generation of Christian preachers and writers talked of Jesus because in him the Kingdom is fully present.\textsuperscript{260} The mission of followers of Jesus is to point the world to Jesus, the fulfillment of God’s story. In Jesus is found the shalom and all-embracing blessing of the God of Israel. This is what the presence of the kingdom bears.\textsuperscript{261} And this is the responsibility and calling of the church. A proper missional theology cannot be content with responsibility that is limited to professionals leading an organization. Mission applies to the whole life of every believer. Being a disciple is being an agent of the kingdom of God. Every disciple is called to carry the mission of God into every sphere of life. We are all missionaries sent into a non-Christian world.\textsuperscript{262}

For the American church, this concept of “sentness” is often unfamiliar. The New World began with a Christendom foundation. Until recently, the culture has been one with Judeo/Christian presuppositions. The church were the senders of missionaries “over there,” often confusing its mission with the perpetuation of the modern metanarrative of progress.\textsuperscript{263} Yet, in the twenty first century, Christianity is no longer the prevailing world view. No longer can the church expect the world to come into the its buildings to hear the gospel. The seeker-sensitive

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{259} Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form, and Function,” 19.
\item \textsuperscript{260} Newbigin, \textit{Open Secret}, loc.545-6 (Kindle).
\item \textsuperscript{261} Ibid, loc.663 (Kindle).
\item \textsuperscript{262} Hirsch, “Defining Missional,” 22.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Bauckham, \textit{Bible and Mission}, 20.
\end{footnotes}
model and the incredible rise of the megachurch has invested huge amounts of money, time, and resources creating interesting services and accessible programs with the intent of reaching people in their local communities who already have an interest in Christianity. This was a workable model in the twentieth century. Even without effective systems, many became disciples in this structure. This has all changed in the twenty-first century. Western culture is a mission field to an uninterested and bears similarity with the first century. All Western Christians are missionaries in an increasingly non-Christian culture.\(^{264}\)

Niemandt proposes that the foundation of confusion between the Western understanding of ecclesiology and its mission has to do with the order of priority as stated above. For the Western church, the church has superseded the primacy of mission. Rather than its foundation, mission has often been shaped by ecclesiology. This is backwards. The appropriate sequence is “the church does what it is [mission] and then the organizes what it does [ecclesiology]”\(^ {265}\)

Through his study of international missional churches, Niemandt has identified a common presuppositional expectation in mission-minded churches that is contrary to much of Western ecclesiology—that the Holy Spirit has the freedom to work actively and unpredictably. This is antithetical to the American church’s emphasis on predictability and control that is dependent upon consistent strategies, buildings, and structures. The bourgeoning international missions-movement demonstrates that a biblical ecclesiology begins with the mission to go, then seeks clarity concerning how the Spirit desires to use his church in the world. A mission-focused organization must be flexible and always seeking discernment concerning the Spirit’s movement.


\(^{265}\) Niemandt, “Trends,” 3.
There is a strong contrast between the Western notion of church as a building or organization and that of a community and family of people. God did not send buildings or organizations into the world. He sent a people to testify and participate in his work. His modus operandi has always been sending a people, not merely using a people to send others nor using a sent person separate from a community.266

As the Church lives out this missional, incarnational ecclesiology, it removes the focus of the church from a self-centered life to a community that is both sensitive and engaging towards outsiders. While its effectiveness and theological appropriateness is debatable, the twentieth-century church sought to do this through attractional programming hosted by the larger church body on the church’s property as a means of being incarnational.267 In contrast, what we see in Jesus’ approach is to enter the space of the outsiders, to eat with them, enter their homes, teach them, challenge them, and develop relationships with them. Hirsch describes God coming into the world in Jesus as “the Eternal moved into the neighborhood and took up residence among us (John 1:14).”268 This was more than just the typically isolated concepts of redemption and salvation, though it surely included those. The incarnation was an often marginalized “radical identification with all that it means to be human.” In the same way we can know Jesus because of his proximity with humanity, so the outsider can know Jesus because as a result of his disciples’ proximity with them.269

266 Ibid, 2-3.
267 Ibid, 4.
269 Ibid, 140.
An incarnational, missional posture requires an ecclesiological redefinition concerning how the church lives out its purpose as a gathered community. It is called, equipped, and sent by the Trinitarian God to participate in God’s mission. It brings the gospel of God’s love, and purpose, and peace to all people’s through which they can experience new life. The church is the means by which God manifests his kingdom in human history, and as citizens of this kingdom and the Body of Christ, the primary mission is to make this Body visible to the world—to be the tangible presence of Christ in the world here and now. This is an appropriate ecclesiology that is birthed from an appropriate missiology. The church is not just on mission, but is a missional community living out the kingdom. Hirsch observes at least six dimensions how the church embodies Jesus’ incarnational identification with the world. First is **Presence**, patiently and intentionally allowing the church (individually and corporately) to simply become part of the fabric of a culture and community, to develop relationships and interact with people individually and corporately so as to live out and share the Gospel. Second is **Proximity**, being available to and directly involved with the people God is calling the church to reach in order that the tangible presence of God can be brought through his people into the marginalized spaces where his presence is typically believed not to be found. Third is **Prevenience**, the stance that God is constantly at work in every person inviting them, even wooing them, into a relationship in and through Jesus. Therefore, God’s people seek to discern what the Spirit is doing in a people and a culture so that they can join him. Fourth is **Powerlessness**, the commitment to humility, servanthood, and submission to become the “least of these.” Fifth is **Passion**, the willingness

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271 Jesus’ concept of powerlessness is unequivocal in his teaching (e.g. Matthew 20:25-28) and through his death (e.g. Phil 2:5-11). This is an area that the late twentieth-century American church has struggled to live out, as
to compassionately identify with and share in the common experiences of the surrounding community’s pain and suffering (Mk 6:34). And this incarnational posture for missions allows, *Proclamation*, the willingness and boldness to share the message of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and glorification as the fulfillment of God’s purpose to participate with and through humanity in his Kingdom.\(^{272}\)

Finally, Niemandt affirms the communal nature of the church through which God’s kingdom is tangibly experienced as the fulfillment of God’s purpose and promise. The community reflects God’s perichoretic character as revealed through the Trinity. As the citizens of God’s kingdom, the church lives out their kingdom citizenship and allegiance to Jesus Christ together. Through the church, the kingdom is made present, though incomplete, but the calling of the church is to be a community that witnesses to and participates with God’s future in the here and now.\(^{273}\) While leading to a renewed future, this ecclesiological participation and witness also looks back to the beginning of humanity’s purpose and promise. It reimagines both God’s original purpose for Adam and Eve to be his co-regent to “work and care” for the world and God’s promise to Abraham to reestablish blessing to the world through a chosen people.\(^{274}\) This

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\(^{272}\) Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 142-144 (Kindle). Moltmann expounds this idea in his thesis to Part One of *Sun of Righteousness, ARISE!* He states that “The future of Christianity is the Church; The future of the church is the kingdom of God,” 18 (Scribd). For Moltmann, the incarnational posture of the church is the means by which God fulfills his purpose of God’s Kingdom.

\(^{273}\) Niemandt, “Trends,” 5.

\(^{274}\) Genesis 2:15-17, 12:1-3.
purpose and promise is foundational to a theology of mission that that understands creation as the first act of mission and the promise as reflective of God’s missional character.275

Benchmarks for Medium of Mission

Concerning the carrying out of mission, in effectively evaluating the microchurch the following benchmarks will be employed:

Benchmark 3: Is the microchurch model culturally relevant and easily adaptable?

Benchmark 4: Does the microchurch model reflect qualities of Incarnation towards one another as well as those outside the community?

The Recipient of Mission

Throughout the Scriptures, the recipient of God’s loving pursuit begins with the poor, the oppressed, the weak, and the outcast.276 He is father to the fatherless and champion for the widow (Psalm 68:5-6). Israel’s election is to be attributed to God’s compassion for such a people (Deut.7:6-8). Yet, forgetting their past identity as slaves, Israel’s self-understanding quickly mutated into the notion that their election was to be attributed to their uniqueness and superiority over the heathen nations. This became a central issue in the condemnation by the Hebrew prophets. Not only should Israel have attributed her existence to God’s compassion and mercy, God’s expectation for Israel was to respond to her election by living out a similar compassion towards others, an expectation that was continually unmet.277


The responsibility and purpose of election was unmistakably tied to God’s original promise to Abraham to “bless the world” through his descendants (Gen.12:1-3). Abraham’s descendants were God’s means of mission to all nations. Their missionary failure is fittingly demonstrated in the Jewish satire of Jonah. Deemed “the missionary document par excellence” and the “most moving interpretation of the missionary calling of God’s people to be found in the Bible,” Jonah demonstrates that no matter how distant or depraved the audience, God’s people are called to extend God’s invitation to them. Unfortunately, like Jonah or the older brother in the Prodigal Son story (Lk 15:11-32), the elect Israel has missed the purpose of God’s calling to be his representatives. The emphasis of God’s kingdom story is not merely conversion, but a call to join God in what he is doing in the world. It’s a call to join in God’s compassion for the world and stewardship of the world. God’s love and compassion know no boundaries. Ninevites are invited along with prostitutes and tax-collectors. Jesus even describes a willingness to leave the ninety-nine who are “in,” to pursue the one who is lost (Mt 18:10-12). God’s desire towards those outside the covenant is as great as his desire for those who are already inside, to the extent that those who are in must seek those who are not... even if they are enemies.280

While Jesus’ interaction with Gentiles makes up only a fraction of the stories in the Gospels, these stories clearly emphasize Jesus’ boundless compassion. He deemphasized much of the Law the Pharisees underscored in order to accentuate the command to love... even to the

278 Ibid, 52-53.
279 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.428 (Kindle).
280 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” – Luke 15:4-7. Bosch, Witness to the World, 53.
point of loving those who crucified him. His miracles were primarily focused upon the hurt, the broken, and the oppressed. Luke introduced Jesus’ ministry as his fulfillment of Isaiah 61 to proclaim good new to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed.²⁸¹ Luke follows this pronouncement with a record of the many stories in which Jesus ministered to those he defined as the prisoners, blind, and oppressed—Samaritans, women, children, lepers, tax-collectors, and all who had a bad reputation as “sinners” and a “mob that knows nothing of the law.”²⁸² People, regardless of race or behavior, were more important than cultural expectations or rules. Jesus conversed with a Samaritan woman, then stayed in her village (Jn 4:40) with a willingness to enter the homes of non-Jews (Luke 7:1-10). He ate with tax-collectors (Matt 9:10) and Pharisees (Luke 7:36) while also touching lepers (8:2-3) and allowing sinful women to anoint him (Luke 7:38). Jesus even told stories where sinners received honor (Luke 15:20-24) and Samaritans were the unexpected hero (Lk 10:36-37).²⁸³

It is important to note that as Jesus quoted the Hebrew Scriptures, he consistently minimized God’s vengeance towards sinners. When he proclaimed his compassionate messianic fulfillment of the Isaiah 61 passage in Luke 4:18-19, he concluded the quotation of his role “proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor” without continuing Isaiah’s thought of also proclaiming “the day of vengeance of our God.” Bosch recounts that in first century synagogue preaching, it would have been customary for the teacher to emphasize God’s vengeance on the enemies of Israel and her Messiah. “Jesus, however, does the unimaginable: He reads only the

²⁸² John 7:49.
²⁸³ Bosch, Witness to the World, 54.
portion on grace…”284 This would have been considered unforgiveable and no doubt contributed to the frenzy that ensued (4:28-29). This omission of God’s vengeance is seen again in Jesus’ response to John the Baptist’s doubts to Jesus’ messiahship. Jesus quotes three separate passages from Isaiah, each time omitting the references to God’s vengeance and judgment.285 This is no coincidence, by which Bosch interprets Jesus’ remark that “blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me” as meaning “blessed is everyone who does not take offence at the fact that the era of salvation differs from what he has expected, that God's compassion on the poor and outcast has superseded divine vengeance!”286 In vengeance’s stead is a ministry of compassion, mercy, and blessing for all who are separate from God. The missionary activity in Acts was hardly distinct from Jesus’ missionary activity, but was instead the furthering of what Jesus began.

The missionary theme of God blessing the nations in order to complete his purposes for creation is common throughout the entirety of Scripture. Unfortunately, the starting point in mission often tends to be exclusive rather than inclusive. In contrast to the typically strong emphasis towards separation and hope as escape from the world, God’s missionary activity is concerned with working in the world.287 Often the language is limited to merely redemption-forgiveness-salvation. These are good things, but they are not complete and should also include the concepts re-creation, life, and wholeness.288

284 Ibid, 55.
286 Bosch, Witness to the World, 56.
287 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.446 (Kindle).
288 Buxton, Dancing in the Dark, loc.4211 (Kindle).
The language of separation always hinders the missional posture of the church. As the disparity widens between the secular and religious cultures of the twenty-first century, there is increasing unfamiliarity and even hostility towards Christianity’s claim of objective truth. The church must emulate Jesus’ posture of love and compassion and seek out opportunities as a witness to Jesus. This posture of love and engagement is the only means by which most will hear the gospel. Long gone are the days where people attend church as a means to find God. To employ a cultural parallel, most American Christians would find it odd if a Muslim neighbor knocked on their door and invited them to join their family for a ‘service’ at the local mosque. The charming Muslim could mention the mosque’s high-quality music, great family programs, and how the Imam is a loving man and a great teacher. Yet, no matter what the Muslim neighbor says, most American Christians would likely reject the invitation merely because they are not “mosque people.” Islam is too “other.” It is considered incorrect. It is not trusted. In a post-911 world, there is misunderstanding and fear concerning the differences between radical Islam and the neighbor’s religion. No matter how passionate the Muslim neighbor is about the great experience available, it would likely make little difference to the majority of Americans. In the same way, the changes happening in American culture toward Christianity are a reminder that the church is a stranger in the world. It, too, is “other” trying to reach those who are not “church people.” The reasons are many: Trust has been broken as a result of the financial scandals of various religious leaders; the condemnation and unpopular policies of the Moral Majority, Religious Right, and Forever Trumpers, and the myriad of sexual scandals and pedophilia of church leaders that were exposed in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. But likely the main reason for the distrust is the intentional separation of the church from the world. Followers of Jesus are often not genuinely known by the world.
The solution to this dilemma, though elusive, is a proper missional stance in the “radical middle.” On one side, Evangelicals have mistakenly reached binary conclusions that good is defined by appropriate behavior and separation from that which is not appropriate, while evil is engaging in cultural activities in which the world participates. As a result, Evangelical churches often reject anything that implies a connection with the culture of the world, instead pursuing subcultures that look bizarre to the cultures they seek to replace. In contrast, the other extreme has been the reaction by more ecumenical circles where the difference between church and world is disregarded. These churches often abandon their Christian-identity as they become increasingly secularized and ineffective due to a reliance on social systems and structures over God’s Spirit. Rejecting both extremes, a proper view of mission is to engage culture without conforming to its assumptions. Paul admonished the Romans, “Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). This was Paul’s posture in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). This was also his attitude to the Corinthian believers, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world” (1Cor 5:9-10). Paul makes it clear that God’s kingdom people should be a people in the world, yet not follow the pattern of the world (Rom 12:2). The church is God’s people living among and relating to those in the world, yet who are working through the tension not to conform to the systems and patterns of the world. The church should contrast the sinful, oppressive, and unloving aspects that exist in any culture while engaging people and translating the good news of Jesus in that culture. The church is a sign of the coming age, the anticipation of
God’s reign on earth as it is in the heavens.\(^{289}\) The recipients of this mission is a divided world that is made One in Christ. While the world is separated into Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female—in Christ all are one.\(^{290}\) In Christ, all are joint heirs of the same family sharing together in the same promise made through Jesus Christ.\(^{291}\) The Western church’s tendency to seek isolation from culture forfeits the opportunity to speak into the culture concerning the gospel. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, the church finds itself at a loss concerning how to communicate.

Communicating to a postmodern, post-Christian culture is a missionary endeavor. Although it is certainly not wrong to stand against sin and injustice, if that is the church’s only engagement with the culture in which it lives, the result is often the church’s marginalization and caricaturizing.\(^{292}\) Humility is critical, otherwise the church will continue to be branded as narrow, angry, and judgmental, characteristics that defined the Pharisees, not Jesus. Relationships with unbelievers is critical and open discussion concerning Christian claims to universal truth should be encouraged. One’s understanding of truth should never be regarded as settled and closed. A genuine openness to dialogue should be the hallmark, not of the relativists, but those who recognize and claim truth in Christ. Sadly, Christians have often treated their beliefs as a truth to be enforced when it is the very nature of Christian truth that it cannot be coerced.\(^{293}\) The mission posture of the Bible is one of witness, rather than compulsion. Witness is an extremely valuable

\(^{289}\) Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 223-225.
\(^{290}\) Gal 3:28.
image with which to counter the postmodern suspicion that all metanarratives are oppressive. A witness is non-coercive and has no power outside of its potential to convince of the truth to which it attests. Witnesses are not expected to persuade or coerce using rhetorical skill or eloquence (1Cor 2:1), but simply testify to the truth for which they are uniquely qualified to give evidence. The church is perfectly positioned to be that witness. In Christendom, people came to a church building where the witness was presented. As culture progresses into post-Christianity, fewer people are inclined to attend a church gathering lessening any exposure to witness. Instead, the kingdom-community must seek to engage with the culture and witness to the world in public forums as a light on a hill.

One of the most effective means by which the church can point to Jesus as witness is through stories. When the metanarrative of Christianity confronts alternative, aggressive metanarratives, a decisive tool available for the witness to Christ is the continual telling of stories, namely the gospel story of Jesus and the transformative stories of how Jesus is still working in the lives of his people today. Any successful, post-Christian model of church, including the microchurch, must tell the stories of what Jesus did in history AND what he is doing today.

Preserving the integrity of the term “missional” is critical in determining the purpose and direction of the church. Living out the mission for which the church is called is essential for the survival of Christianity in the West. If the church fails to engage people in their culture with methods of communication that speak to them, then the Western church will inevitably continue

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to diminish into insignificance. But there is hope to be found from the past. The situation the disciples faced in first century Roman culture speaks directly to the twenty-first century struggle and provides “afresh what it means to bear witness to the gospel from a position not of strength but of weakness.”296 The identity of the first century church was a “pilgrim people” whose distinctiveness was not the quality of their gatherings, but their sent-ness. To follow Christ and participate in Christ was equated with participation in his mission to the world.297

Yet, an identification with the mission of the first century must not be equated with their strategy of mission. The first century disciples labored to contextualize the gospel then and there. Some strategies were more effective than others. While a variety of principles can be derived from their approaches, every generation must seek to contextualize the gospel for their own time and culture. There is no norm.298 Although God clearly desires the church to grow numerically, this type of measurable growth is only a part of a much larger missional agenda. Mission is essentially God’s people living as God’s tangible presence in God’s world empowered by God’s Spirit to be the anticipation of God’s kingdom on earth as it already is in heaven. God is the center. Strategy is how each community deems this best accomplished, to live as extension of God’s missionary presence in the world, living in and among the world through incarnational relationships that lead to discernment and understanding of the cultural distinctions through which to communicate. Every kingdom community is given the freedom in its missional mandate

296 Newbigin, *Open Secret*, loc.5 (Kindle).
297 Ibid, loc.29 (Kindle).
to respond to the ever-changing contexts in order to adequately reveal God’s invitation to know him and join him in his kingdom work.  

Any attempt at sharing the gospel must involve the shaping of language to fit the experience of both the speaker and the hearer. Language is shaped by experience. Shared experience creates shared language which embodies a culture’s beliefs about life and death, sin and virtue, guilt and forgiveness, God and humanity. As a result, any evaluation of a church model must assess the means by which Christ-followers are able and encouraged to share life with those they are trying to reach. As Paul continuously demonstrates, mission must include more than preaching, it must also embrace dialogue and proximity. Mission in and to the world is not about imposing ethical standards on the world. Disciples of Jesus are called to disciple others through community and teaching, not to perfect behavior. The call to disciple is the call to continually move people closer to Jesus. This process is often identified by two different terms sharing the same meaning on different sides of salvation—evangelism and discipleship. Before allegiance is given to Jesus as Lord, the typical term is evangelism. After salvation, the term is discipleship. Both terms refer to the objective of moving people closer to Jesus. The goals of evangelism and discipleship are not behavior change, they are the inevitable

299 Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form, and Function,” 134.
300 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.1981. (Kindle)
301 Ibid, loc.2234 (Kindle). Dialogue was a staple for Paul’s mission strategy. Acts 13:42-43 shows that after speaking in the synagogue, “many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.” In Thessalonica, Paul “reasoned with [those in the synagogue]” (Acts 17:1-4, 18:19). In Ephesus, he “had discussion daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:8-9). To the Corinthians, Paul reveals his motivation to “persuade others” (2 Cor.5:11). At Mars Hill, Paul “began to interact with the Jews and Gentile God-worshipers in the synagogue” (Acts 17:17) and then had an extended conversation with the Greek council (Acts 17:19-20).
302 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc.1784. (Kindle)
results. The goal is life found in Christ along with his followers continual conformity to his image. The missional purpose of the kingdom is not making bad people good, it is making dead people alive. Evaluation of the microchurch model, therefore, must include an assessment of the proximity with people outside of the church culture along with structures for creating friendships that introduce people to Jesus (evangelism) and grow them in Jesus (discipleship). Empowerment and freedom, though seemingly risky, are required for growth. A church movement that seeks to live out their missional calling must allow others to live out their faith and leadership without demanding perfection.

_Benchmarks for Mission In and To the World_

**Benchmark 5:** Does the microchurch model encourage proximity with unbelievers through culturally engaged relationships?

**Benchmark 6:** Does the microchurch model provide structures for ongoing disciple-making?

Mission in Community

Reflecting the community of the Trinity, Hirschman’s research establishes that the minimal elements of God’s mission begins with a community united by faith in Jesus Christ, abiding together, caring for one another, and experiencing the presence of God together.303 Together this community is the Body of Christ, God’s tangible presence _together_ in the world “breaking bread in their homes and eating together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God

303 Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form, and Function,” 128. Hirschman's full list of elements of the _missio Dei_ comprise the following: Community, Context, Discipleship, God's Kingdom, Incarnational, and Missionary. These concepts are clarified as: “1) community - groups of people united by faith in Jesus Christ and caring for one another; 2) context - the place of daily living and interaction with others; 3) discipleship – the continuing developmental process of spiritual growth; 4) God’s Kingdom – the presence of God in the world establishing his reign; 5) incarnational – the presence of Christ in his followers, and 6) missionary – the identification with God’s plans and purposes.”
and enjoying the favor of the people” (Acts 2:46-47). The earliest post-resurrection Christian community described in Acts demonstrates that living as a unified community in Christ naturally extends into mission as the “Lord added to their numbers daily those who are being saved” (Acts 2:47).\(^{304}\) The heart of the church’s life together is the Eucharist in which the kingdom is present among his people, a diverse people representing all nations participating together in the death and resurrection of Jesus.\(^ {305}\) This community is Trinitarian in nature, a *missional community* of witnesses called to be disciples and make disciples together. It is a community of faith that experiences life together in the Spirit and who are equipped by God and sent into the world to *testify* and *participate* in Christ’s work.\(^ {306}\)

What the church is called to be (community) and called to do (mission) are inseparable. Mission lived out through the Kingdom-community leads to proper ecclesiology. This has been the difficulty with the individualistic, consumeristic expressions of the Western church. The natural drive of consumerism is the need and preference of the individual over that of the community. It is an inward focus rather than an outward one. The result is mission programs devoid of community, and community programs devoid of mission. The former is exemplified through the sending of professional missionaries with funding and accountability to do the work of the mission and through volunteer ministry programs available to interested individuals in the church. The latter is illustrated in the various small groups and Sunday School programs that

\(^{304}\) Buxton, *Dancing in the Dark*, loc.3988 (Kindle).

\(^{305}\) Newbigin, *Open Secret*, loc.740 (Kindle).

\(^{306}\) Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, ‘Trends in missional ecclesiology’, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 68(1), Art. #1198, 9 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1198. Bonhoeffer also affirms this. “…our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has given to him.” In other words, the community participates and even makes possible the living out the mission from God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John Doberstein, 5th ed. (London: SCM Press, 2015), 13.
exist as hubs of community and learning, yet are often devoid of mission. A proper concept of mission must be that which is carried out in community.

Benchmark for Living out Mission in Community

**Benchmark 7:** Does the microchurch model emphasize mission being lived out in community.

**Summary**

The objective of this chapter was a defining of the concepts of mission and kingdom by which to evaluate the microchurch model. The essence of the kingdom is God’s reign through King Jesus with the participation of his kingdom citizens, the church, who with delegated authority in their allegiance to Jesus live out their faith through their love and submission to Jesus and others. Mission is the invitation by God through his people to all of humanity to join God’s kingdom-community for the stated kingdom purposes. Both kingdom and mission precede the church and are based in the Trinitarian character of God. Kingdom and mission are the premise of the biblical story. Everything the church is called to do and the methods by which this is done (ecclesiology) is based out of God’s kingdom and God’s mission.

This understanding of kingdom and mission has become lost in much of Western Christendom. Rather than seeking to incarnationally engage culture as Jesus did, Christendom often seeks separation and a demand for conformity before inviting outsiders into the community. This idea, deemed a “theology of glory,” is the antithesis of Christ’s “theology of the cross” in which new life is found through sacrifice and the refusal to leverage privilege and power for one’s own benefit. The postmodern abandonment of Christendom is resulting in the diminution of the Western church necessitating an inevitable paradigm shift that will likely result in the demise of church as it has been known. Yet, in the spirit of the theology of the cross, hope
is extended that this death will lead to the next generation of Western churches experiencing resurrection and new life as it responds through the engagement of culture with relevant images and stories of the gospel and the testimony of God’s Kingdom people. Is the microchurch a means by which this new life as God’s kingdom-community will be experienced? That is the question the next two chapters seeks to answer.
CHAPTER 4 – DEFINING THE MICROCHURCH

Introduction

As voluntary followers of Jesus, the Church is the citizens of God’s Kingdom called to live out the ways of the Kingdom as the anticipation of a return to God’s original and intended design for all of creation. The missio Dei is God’s passionate invitation for reconciliation with and restoration for humanity. The church is the instrument through which God is working out his mission to bring this renewal and establish justice for the ongoing restoration of the world in anticipation of the Kingdom’s full realization. This picture of the church as the anticipation of God’s future kingdom was so attractive in the early centuries of the church that the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its identity. In stark contrast, attraction is not typically how the Western church is currently perceived. New models of how the church lives out kingdom-life must be created concurrent with an awakening of the heart towards God’s mission. The question posed by this thesis is to determine whether the microchurch model appropriately reflects God’s heart for mission along with an effectiveness in fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples who live as the anticipation of God’s Kingdom in the present culture. This chapter attempts to define the microchurch through an ecclesiological comparison with the prevailing attractional church model by which the microchurch’s effectiveness will be evaluated in the following chapter.

Discipleship: The mode of mission

The story of Christendom has been one of power and authority. It is a recent story of Western superiority disseminating its theology and cultural assumptions even as other expressions of Christianity have proven to be more effective. If Jesus’ Great Commission is to be
taken literally, it is a charge to pursue all people (all nations) offering inclusion through baptism into God’s Kingdom-community (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are taught within that community to become like Jesus in both understanding and lifestyle (teaching them to observe all I have commanded you) and who continually foster a relationship with Jesus (I am with you always). Jesus proclaimed these words as he departed, yet the command was to continually walk together in conformity to Christ’s image through the power of the Spirit. This post-resurrection exhortation aligns with Jesus’ pre-resurrection prayer on behalf of those who were not yet disciples, “for those who will believe in me through their message that they [all] may be one” (Jn 17:20-21). Making and growing disciples is the task of the Church made possible as individual followers and communities are continuously conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-13) as they imitate Jesus example of a sacrificial servant (Mk 10:45, Phil 2:8) in their love for the world. Discipleship is the perpetuation of God’s eschatological dream for his kingdom that happens through continual and collective dying and resurrection to new life as Jesus’ followers are called to surrender their lives together for each other and for the world. It is “new creation” (2Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15) that emanates from the death of Jesus in order that resurrection life can be experienced as a result of God’s work in the disciple (Rom 6:4). In God’s Kingdom all are called and no one is excluded. There are no strangers or aliens, but a community of disciples being continually conformed to the image of Christ through the one unified people.

Discipleship is the mode of mission.

308 Ibid, 136.
Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations was clearly intended to make one unified, participating people from the whole world. “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile” (Rom 3:22). This truly is the good news entrusted to the Church. As Jesus demonstrated, unity in his Kingdom is dependent upon humility, a characteristic often lacking in the West. As Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the Father’s will to be done and kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, he was describing the dream of the entire biblical story as fulfilled in him. It is the ongoing story of reversal where God becomes the fulfillment of what it means to be fully human for the purpose of reconciliation with humanity. Incarnation is the culmination of God’s Kingdom coming to earth. It is the story of the strong relinquishing power so the weak can share in power. In Jesus’ upside-kingdom so aptly described in the Sermon on the Mount, it is through weakness and humility that the Kingdom is realized; the first becoming last. This is not merely a story that resulted from the Fall, it is the story which originally began with the delegation of authority to the lesser “other” prior to the Fall. This was the story perpetuated by Jesus. Even prior to the Great Commission, Jesus sent his disciples out in teams of two as his representatives to invite people into the kingdom (Mk 6:7). During his passion week, he prayed, “As you [Father] have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.... May they be one, together, as we are one. May they also be one in us so that the world

310 Stetzer and Im, Planting Missional Churches, loc 806 (Kindle). The motif of God uniting “all nations” is one seen throughout both Testaments, see Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14; Ex.9:16; Josh 4:24; 1Kg 8:43, 8:60; 2Chr 6:33; Ps 22:27, 33:8, 64:9, 67:2-3, 72:17, 82:8, 86:9, 98:3, 102:15; Isa 2:2, 56:7, 61:11, 66:18, 66:20, 66:23; Jer 3:17, 33:9; Dan 7:14; Zeph 2:11, 3:9; Hag 2:7; Zech 8:23; Mt 28:19-20; Mk 11:17; Lk 2:31-32, 3:6; Jn 17:23; Acts 1:8, 2:17, 2:25, 10:35, 13:47; Rom 1:5, 14:11, 16:26; Gal 3:8; Phil 2:10-11; 1Tim 2:3-4; 2Pt 3:9; 1Jn 2:2; Rev 7:9, 14:6, 15:4.

311 Wright, How God Became King, 83 (Kindle).
God’s kingdom-plan was always to work through humanity, a task that fallen humanity was unable to carry out autonomously. Therefore, Jesus is the only one capable of restoring the kingdom to its original design. Jesus makes it possible for humanity to participate with him through being continually conformed to the image of Christ through the power of his Spirit. The Great Commission is a call and invitation to join God in the ultimate restoration of humanity’s original purpose as co-regents for God. Is the Western church, the attractional church, answering that call? Does the microchurch model do any better? A proper evaluation benefits from a standard by which to measure, and though imperfect, the New Testament church offers numerous examples of how effective discipleship is lived out in a variety of contexts.

The Apostle Paul made disciples through his relationship with the believers in Thessalonica where “as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1Th 2:7–8). Relationship was foundational to his multiplication strategy described in his letter to Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2Tm 2:2). Following Jesus’ pattern, Paul’s understanding of discipleship was a multi-generational, familial relationship of proximity and mentorship that emphasized its perpetuation to succeeding generations—disciples

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312 Author’s paraphrase.

313 John 16:7-11 – “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”
pouring into other disciples who are expected to pour others. 

Discipleship is the whole process of introduction, conversion, maturation, and multiplication. It is inherently a missional endeavor. If there is no mission and no multiplication, there is no discipleship.

This is a starkly different idea of discipleship from what has developed in the West. Rather than relational proximity, discipleship has typically been defined as the dissemination of information. Rather than success being defined by multiplication and mission, discipleship has typically been characterized by growing in knowledge through lecture and personal study. This has been fundamental to the diminishing of the Western church in both numbers and influence. Though Western culture is often recognized for experimentation and risk, the Western Church has not followed suit. Despite specialized training, enormous effort, financial investment, and continual prayers for revival, the church is continually falling behind other parts of the world in its ability to make disciples. The Pew Research Center reports that between 2007 and 2014, the number of Americans claiming to be Christians dropped over 7%. In contrast, the Church is

314 This was true throughout the NT. Jesus referred to his disciples as his children in Mk 10:24 and Jn 13:33. Paul used the parent/child metaphor to churches and to individuals he was discipling (1Cor 4:14, 4:17; 2Cor 6:13; Gal 4:19; Ph 2:22; 1Th 2:7-8; 1Tim 1:2, 1:8; 2Tim 1:2, 2:1; Titus 1:4; Philemon 10. Peter used the term concerning Mark (1Pt 5:13) and it is a frequent motif in John’s Epistles (1Jn 2:1, 2:12, 2:14, 2:18, 2:28, 3:7, 3:18, 4:4, 5:21; 2Jn 1; 3Jn 4. Paul trained young workers in the city of Ephesus in the same way that Jesus trained the Twelve in Galilee. As was true in Paul’s own life, those Paul trained were: (1) called by God, (2) prepared in the context of the gathering-scattering church life, and (3) sent by the Spirit through Paul himself (Acts 16:1–3; 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:1–2). Paul’s apprentices learned how to live out their faith in Jesus, how to experience the fellowship in the community of Jesus, and how to multiply this to others. See Viola, Finding Organic Church, 92 (Kindle).


317 Hirsch and Nelson, Reframation, 53 (Kindle).

multiplying rapidly elsewhere. As the West continues to emphasize centralization around a specific clergy-led gathering, decentralization is fueling the multiplying of churches around the world through the mentoring and empowering of disciples who live out the gospel in the places where they live and work.\textsuperscript{319}

The Western church has an inadequate paradigm perpetuated from overconfidence in the abundance of information available while still operating under an antiquated system.\textsuperscript{320} Though its methods have proven irrelevant to post-modern culture, the American church still haughtily considers itself the authority for normative ecclesiology and methodology and as such is hesitant to learn from church movements outside the West. This has resulted in lost ground in reaching Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. The Western Church has a problem. It must embrace humility and recognize its growing inability to influence surrounding culture. It must reexamine its methods and structures and seek help from the disciple-making, multiplying churches in Asia, Africa, and South America.\textsuperscript{321} As Western culture continues the shift from modernity to postmodernity, the church must adapt in order to effectively communicate the gospel to the current generation. The creation of new programs in an old paradigm will remain ineffective. Since Postmoderns value belonging and a shared story more than programs, a fundamental shift must occur that allows for growth within an authentic community where individual and communal stories are shared and valued. Rather than planning events hoping to entice outsiders to visit institutional activities, the church would be wise to invest in smaller

\textsuperscript{319} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 27-29.


\textsuperscript{321} Ibid, 4.
church models where each person’s story is communicated and disciples are trained to share the gospel, the story of Jesus, within natural relationships with those in their surrounding communities. This is the task of the microchurch.

Gathering and Scattering

The Great Commission is tied to the recurring theme of gathering and scattering found throughout God’s story with humanity. The human race gathered in pride at the Tower of Babel until they were scattered by God into the various languages and people groups.\textsuperscript{322} Conversely, those from all nations were gathered at Pentecost to hear about God’s mighty work of resurrection from which they scattered in return to their own people with the message of the gospel.\textsuperscript{323} God gathered a nation to himself in the Promised Land only to scatter them to Assyria and Babylon as a result of their idolatry. And as the early church gathered as a kingdom-family in Christ in Acts 2, they were soon scattered by persecution and the move of God’s Spirit to propel the message of the gospel beyond Jewish territory to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 8).\textsuperscript{324} Gathering and scattering is a characteristic of God’s methodology choosing to gather a people to himself from the scattered peoples of the world only to later send them out again.

\textsuperscript{322} Gen 11:1-9.

\textsuperscript{323} Acts 2:1-47.

\textsuperscript{324} The persecuting scattering in Acts 8:1-3 continues the process by which Acts 1:8 is fulfilled when Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Pentecost, Acts 2); and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Persecution and Scattering).” Ed Stetzer, foreword to \textit{AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church} by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 12 (Kindle). Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, \textit{AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 26 (Kindle).
The mission of the church, the *missio ecclesiae*, seems to be a beautiful continuation of this pattern through an organic, living movement of people from all nations gathering as one unified people who then scatter back to all nations with an invitation to participate in the gathering. Unfortunately, this is not often reflected in the Western church which gathers masterfully yet is woefully inadequate in its ability or willingness to scatter. Rather than reflecting the living Body of Christ, the Western church has more closely resembled an institution.\(^{325}\) While living bodies reproduce (addition) with continued reproduction in ensuing generations (multiplication), the Western church has most often sought growth through the gathering of additional attenders with very limited multiplicative reproduction. And though some Western churches grow very quickly and may even expand into a variety of campuses, multiplication is often stifled by a centrality in authority and structure. Though rapid addition may occur, it is nonetheless still addition. Typically, gathering emphasizes nurture and protection with minimal import given to the risky and costly requirements of reproduction through the sending out of mature and trained disciples.

Halter and Smay are convinced the Church is most effective when it follows God’s gathering *and* scattering motif. They characterize the attractional model as a primarily gathering entity which merely invites outsiders to participate in the gathering. There is little emphasis on a corresponding scattering to go into the world and bless the world.\(^{326}\) Returning to God’s mission for the Church is only possible if the Western Church is willing to rediscover God’s gathering/scattering methodology and develop models that emphasize both aspects. They suggest

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\(^{326}\) Halter and Smay, *AND*, 14 (Kindle).
that the best models will be through the development of smaller micro-communities (i.e. microchurches) with a renewed emphasis on propelling their gathered bodies back into the world. Halter and Smay describe the Church as “beautiful because it is endowed with the purpose of giving herself away wholeheartedly to the world God desires to redeem.”

Early in his ministry, Jesus gathered his disciples with a primary intent to scatter. He called them to “follow me (gather) and I will send you out (scatter) to fish for people” (Mk 1:17). Jesus then spent his time gathered with his disciples in missional endeavors of healing and teaching to reveal the Kingdom of God. The Great Commission is a gathering and scattering command to “Go and make disciples” where “surely I will be with all of you, even to the very end of the age to come.”

The missiological purpose of gathering and scattering is the making of disciples for the reconciliation and restoration of the world to experience eternal, kingdom life. This defines what the Church is and what it does, yet Jesus offers very little strategy to accomplish this work. There is no normative methodology concerning how the church gathers and scatters. There is no single New Testament pattern to guide culturally relevant mission strategies. Jesus offers the opportunity for imagination and creativity. “Jesus did not set up a rigid model for action but, rather, inspired his disciples to prolong the logic of his own action in a creative way amid the new and different historical circumstances in which the community would have to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in word and deed.”

Authentic discipleship allows for, even demands imagination, creativity, and unconventional methodologies that should be

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327 Ibid, 33.
328 Author’s paraphrase of Mt 28:19-20.
329 2Cor 5:17-20, Jn 3:16, Mt 6:33.
continuously evaluated and modified to determine if a church model is participating in the activities of gather and scattering.331

Ecclesial minimums

Two millennia of Christianity, especially since the Reformation, have created a myriad of church models and structures attempting to flesh out what it means to be the “Church.” This multiplicity begs a variety of questions: “What is the church at its most basic level?” “Is every gathering of ‘two or three in Jesus’ name’ (Mt 18:20) considered a church?” “Is there a difference between a ministry of a church and the actual church itself?” Microchurch leader Brian Sanders uses the term *ecclesial minimum* to characterize the three most elemental functions of what defines an actual church: Worship, Community, and Mission.332 A defining of each of these terms can be found in Appendix A.

This idea of a three-fold *ecclesial minimums* has wide support. Newbigin defines the church as a “community of praise” that remembers the words and deeds of Jesus and together centers its life in Jesus333 while being “deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood” as priests to the world.334 Bosch defines the Church as “the *community* of believers, gathered by divine election, calling, new birth, and conversion, which lives in communion with the Triune God (*worship*), is granted the forgiveness of sins, and sent to serve the world in solidarity with

331 Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 20.
334 Ibid, loc.4273 (Kindle).
all mankind (*mission*).” Neil Cole identifies the church as “the presence of Jesus among His people (*worship*) called out as a spiritual family (*community*) to pursue His *mission* on this planet.” Mike Breen frames the church in three interconnected relationships: *Worship* is described through the “upward” relationship with the Father, *community* refers to the “inward” relationship with the diverse family committed to one another and the mission, and *mission* refers to the “outward” relationship with the hurting world surrounding the community.

Of course, churches typically participate in activities beyond these three elements, but without an expression of all three elements it does not meet the minimum requirements of a church. Therefore, gathering a *community* of Christ-followers to study the Bible or share a meal does not meet the *ecclesial minimums*. Neither does the establishing of a worship service, the definition of “church planting” often assumed by Western denominations. This helps to explain the lack of efficacy of the Western Church. *Missional* endeavors such as helping the poor and promoting justice, as much a part of the gospel as the other three, by themselves does not satisfy the basic conditions of a church. In contrast, if all three conditions of worship, community, and mission are met, it is a manifestation of the church regardless how small or clumsy the expression. While buildings, worship services, and organizational structures are helpful, they

335 Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 222-223; emphasis added.
336 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 57 (Kindle); emphasis added.
338 Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc 666 (Kindle). While dissent could quickly occur resulting from competing definitions of the concepts of worship, community, and mission, a thorough description of each can be found in the attached Appendix A.
are not fundamental to a gathered and scattered Church. Therefore, the evaluation of any model must determine first whether the model is actually a church. This includes both the attractional model and the microchurch.

Contrasting Ecclesial Systems

An Introduction to the Microchurch

In this thesis, the microchurch is defined as the most primal, essential definition of what it means to be the church in its simplest form. It interrelates all three essential elements of the church—worship, community, and mission—in contrast with the macro-version of attractional models that often isolate them from one another. Banks explains that the microchurch is basically a hybrid of the “simple church” model and a revised Western attractional model. His understanding of “simple church” involves face-to-face meeting of small numbers of adults and children who are committed to developing a common life in Christ. They meet weekly in a house, apartment, or other hospitable space. Even more important than the meeting space is their mutual care for and accountability to one another. As an extended Christian family they desire to worship, pray, study the scriptures, share with one another, love on one another, play, and eat together. Through their mutual ministry to one another they learn to identify and use the gifts God had given them in both the church family and in the wider community. And while each

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339 Cole, Church 3.0, 59 (Kindle).

small expression views itself as “the church,” they also recognize the importance of congregating regularly with and networking with a larger group of God’s people.\textsuperscript{341}

Concerning the church, the designations micro and macro have little to do with size since megachurches and small congregational churches are both deemed “macro” while microchurch networks can get very large. The contrast focuses instead on levels of participation and who senses the burden for the church community. In the Western macro-model, empowerment is usually limited to a few clergy who make decisions and provide the spiritual services for the many. In contrast, each microchurch is inherently small in number, yet all are expected to participate in the actual ministry of the church while networking with other microchurches for more extensive impact.\textsuperscript{342} Microchurches are defined as spiritual communities surrendered to the lordship of Jesus where every individual identifies with the communal responsibility of living out God’s mission in the world. Mission is not deemed the task of professional missionaries but is the corporate responsibility of every participant. Unlike small groups or a Sunday School class, the microchurch is not merely a ministry of the church—it is the church. Microchurch leaders, though typically not vocational, carry the weight of spiritual authority and the responsibilities attendant to it.\textsuperscript{343}

The ecclesial minimums are interrelated and inseparable in the microchurch model. Worship is not an activity or experience observed but a way of life that is lived out in community with other Christ-followers as they “go” in Jesus’ name to bring kingdom-life to one another and

\textsuperscript{341} Stetzer and Im, \textit{Planting Missional Churches}, loc.2043 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{342} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, 167 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{343} Moore and Wilson, \textit{Mega Multi Multiply}, 34-35.
those in the wider community.\textsuperscript{344} While the attractional model conveys a passive attitude of “come and join us as we experience worship together,” the microchurch is defined by living out corporate faith with one another and together in their surrounding community. The microchurch is the tangible presence of Jesus to others. Rather than measuring success by the numbers of people who attend a program, it is defined as a kingdom-community of corporate expression and maturation into the image of Christ (worship), ministry to and with one another (community), and blessing others in Jesus’ name (mission). The microchurch expression may or may not involve singing, offerings, or sermons, yet it is still the very essence of being the church.\textsuperscript{345}

Describing the necessary focal shift from internal to external, Reggie McNeal describes the microchurch as “…decentralized, simple, not membership-driven, synched with normal life routines and patterns, not dependent on clergy, and focused on the spiritual development of the participants and the people they touch.\textsuperscript{346} As such the microchurch is more like an organic being than a manufactured institution. It is defined by participation and mobilization of the entire community participating as ministers who use the gifts and calling God has given them. It is less perfect and orderly. Limitations are quickly identified, and modifications implemented. When participation in worship, community-life, and mission ends, the microchurch ceases to exist. In stark contrast, attractional models often base success not in depth of participation, but on the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{344} Ibid, 34-35. Sanders, Microchurches, loc.1086 (Kindle). JR Woodward and Dan White Jr., The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarcational Communities (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 171 (Kindle).
\item \textsuperscript{345} Moore and Wilson, Mega Multi Multiply, 69-70.
\item \textsuperscript{346} Reggie McNeal, Missional Renaissance: Changing The Scorecard For The Church, A Leadership Network Publication (San Francisco, CA Jossey Bass Publishing, 2009), 57-58 (Kindle).
\end{itemize}
number of attenders and financial donors. This often leads to a much slower recognition of ineffectiveness and sustained existence long after missional efficacy has concluded.

A Priority Shift in Missiology and Ecclesiology

The microchurch also presents a fundamental difference in missiological and ecclesiological priority. In *Church 3.0*, Neil Cole uses the metaphor of software updates to characterize the evolution of priority from the early church to the present. Cole labels the church that began at Pentecost “Church 1.0.” While developing through various stages of increasing institutionalism, it remained a “grassroots, marginalized movement under the threat of intense persecution.” This changed in A.D. 313 with Constantine’s Edict of Milan when Christianity shifted from the margins of society to the mainstream. Christendom was established as an entirely new operating system, what Neil identifies as “Church 2.0.” And though there have been many modifications through the subsequent seventeen hundred years of adaption and reformation, Christendom’s fundamental structures have remained mostly unchanged. The transition between Church 1.0 and 2.0 was revolutionary. Similarly, the current transition between Christendom’s 2.0 and what Cole refers to as “Church 3.0,” of which the microchurch is an example, is equally disruptive and surprising similar in methodology to the early church.

The early church (1.0) was capricious from its very inception. Beginning in Jerusalem, it quickly developed into a large gathering of people that met both in homes and in the temple. The church in Jerusalem had parallels with the present attractional model in its homogenous cultural

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347 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 5-6 (Kindle).
348 Ibid, 99 (Kindle).
identity and original focus on growth by addition.\footnote{349} It was only through persecution and the scattering of the church that it diversified into a multiethnic, multiplying community. As the church’s proximity expanded and Gentiles were incorporated, meeting in the temple was no longer an option. Instead, the church was limited to small, local communities who networked together with other local communities. These local and networked communities began sending out missionaries resulting in multiplication of new church communities, as exemplified by the Antioch church sending Paul and Barnabas to plant indigenous, autonomous churches throughout Asia Minor.\footnote{350} The communities in Thessalonica diversified even further to become a multiethnic and missional regional network that spread far beyond its locale. The churches in Ephesus became a brilliantly crafted, decentralized network of missional communities where Paul discipled new converts during the three years he lived in the city. These disciples were then sent out all over Asia, as far as the Roman capital, to do the same.\footnote{351}

In his thoroughly researched article on “Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom,” Alan Kreider describes the first century church as Christian communities meeting in the largest rooms of various members’ houses. Rarely wealthy, the attendance of each group was likely no more than fifteen or twenty people.\footnote{352} These early churches inherited much of their patterns of community and worship from the Jewish synagogue, including hymns, prayers, scripture lessons, discussion, storytelling, meals, commemorative rituals, festivals, and Sabbath. Christians quickly

\footnote{349} “they added to their numbers daily.” -- Acts 2:47.
\footnote{350} Ralph Moore and Todd Wilson, Mega Multi Multiply: Your Church as a Multiplication Platform (Exponential, 2018), 22-23.
added the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed to their corporate worship.\footnote{Wolfgang Simson, \textit{Houses that Change the World: The Return of the House Churches} (Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Authentic Media, 2004), 58-59.} These early Christians considered themselves resident aliens and strangers living within a foreign community with the responsibility to love their neighbors as Jesus loved them. There was no teaching more repeated by the Christians or more bewildering to the pagans than Jesus’ command to love one’s enemies. The Old Testament allusion to “swords being beaten into plowshare” (Is.2:4, Mic 4:3) was foundational to the early church’s vision of non-violence and love.\footnote{Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3.} The sheer breadth of this vision was alluring to much of the weary Roman populace. Christians were inviting outsiders into a community living out God’s grand design to be instruments for the reconciliation and restoration of the human race.\footnote{Kreider, “Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom,” 11.} The priority of missiology and ecclesiology, mission and church, were both emphasized.

Contrasting the approach of the last several centuries, it is fascinating that the early church’s explosive growth included little direct preaching to those outside the community of faith. It was simply too dangerous. And though pagans were initially allowed to participate in Christian worship, beginning in the Neronian persecution of the mid-60’s, they were not actively evangelized or even welcomed into Christian worship gatherings for fear of the “lying informers.”\footnote{1Cor 14:23-25, Paul explains how to respond to unbelievers who are in the worship gathering. In Corinth, it was clearly expected that pagans would participate. This demonstrates how the early Christians were in the tradition of the Jewish synagogues to invite outsiders into the community. See Kreider, “Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom,” 9. Yet, this quickly ended after the Neronian persecution. Kreider states that from this point on, there is the surprising “absence of pastoral admonitions to evangelize” (Kreider, “Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom,” 8).} The Christians made it very difficult for unbelievers to be included in the Church.
gatherings without a recommendation from a respected believer, cross-examination, and a lengthy catechumen process. Even then, until they were baptized, converts were only allowed to stay for the biblical reading and teaching before being formally dismissed during the communitive actions of the Eucharist. The secretive nature of their gatherings eventually led to Christians being misunderstood and judged by Roman authorities but did little to hinder growth of the movement. Caecilius, a pagan contemporary of the first century church, complained that the Christians “…never speak in public, never meet in the open, if it be not that the aspect of their worship is either criminal or shameful?” But the early Christians learned to live out their mission through their lifestyle and devotion towards one-another with a social inclusivity unparalleled in ancient society. Very quickly, Christians were found in almost every socio-economic stratum. The hesitation of unbelievers to associate with Christians was often overcome by “observing the consistent lives of their [Christian] neighbors… or experiencing the way they did business with them.” Even though Christians were typically quiet and aloof, in times of illness and crisis the multitudes would often turn to them for help. It was through these friendships that most chose to convert.

By the mid-third century, the ecclesiological shift towards institutionalism was growing. As congregations were increasing in both numbers and wealth, they began to convert private residences into locales designed to meet the needs of larger congregations. This perpetuated a


growing distinction between clergy and laity which was aided by the need to respond
apologetically to developing heresies. Even as early as A.D. 100, the concept of a special clergy
was already evident in letters by Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch in Syria (c.110-17)
concerning the role of the “bishop” as the autocratic head of the local church. The “need” to
defend the truth led to an intense focus on dogma and an established creed. As a result,
distinctions were made concerning who was and was not allowed to do the work of ministry.
Increasing control was exerted by the recognized clergy resulting in the diminishing participation
by the masses in any type of “official ministry” capacity.362

With the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, the Church 2.0 quickly transitioned from house
meetings to legalistic and ritualistic patterns of corporate worship located separately from the
community. Christianity quickly became a means to gain respect and power, causing the
numbers of the church to grow even more rapidly. Yet, the priority of ecclesiology had
completely overtaken that of mission as Christianity became the national identity. By 392,
approximately half of the imperial populace considered themselves Christian. In that same year,
Emperor Theodosius I outlawed all worship apart from the state-sanctioned version of
Christianity. Christendom was immediately the unrivaled religion of the Roman Empire.363
Official forms of Christian worship, the cathegogue system, became a symbiosis of the Jewish
temple and synagogue structure. Similarly, the recognized form of church governance imitated
the Roman administrative hierarchy.364 “The Church” was redefined as the gathering location,
the clergy the recognized ministers, and the tithe was imposed as a type of “Christian-tax” to

support the work of the official church.\textsuperscript{365} An unexpected result of this new Christendom church structure was the withering of the internationalism of early Christianity. While Church 1.0 found uniqueness as a trans-national family of God, in Church 2.0, God became associated primarily with one’s local ecclesiology. This led to rampant discontinuity and division which would eventually manifest itself in some of the bloodiest wars humanity had yet experienced.\textsuperscript{366}

Modality and Sodality: Reframing the Priority Shift

An understanding of this priority shift between ecclesiology and missiology is aided further through Ralph Winter’s article “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission.” Winter describes two specific early-church patterns that were marginalized in Christendom and are reemphasized in the microchurch.\textsuperscript{367} The first pattern was a contextual one originating in the Jerusalem Church where the assembly of Christ followers used the literal word “synagogue” for their assembly.\textsuperscript{368} As the church expanded beyond Jerusalem to include Gentiles, Jewish structures soon transitioned to correspond to the familiar Roman civil governmental structures including the actual Latin terms for territories and local districts—the diocese and the parish.\textsuperscript{369} Winters juxtaposes this rigid systemic shift with the more adaptable monastic tradition that

\textsuperscript{365} Kreider, “Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom,” 29.

\textsuperscript{366} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{368} This is exemplified in the NIV’s translation of the word συναγωγή as “meeting” in James 2:2.

\textsuperscript{369} Winter, “The Two Structures,” 220-230.
developed within just a few generations of the apostolic church.\textsuperscript{370} As local ecclesiology became more organized around a central leadership, the monastic pattern offered all the opportunity to participate in the church’s missiological activity. By the fourth century, these two differing patterns had developed into distinct structures—the diocese and the monastery—which both significantly contributed to the transmission and expansion of Christianity.\textsuperscript{371} Winter refers to these interdependent structures as modalities and sodalities.\textsuperscript{372}

The diocese-parish modality is a foundational construct with the static patterns of the local congregation and denomination. Slow to change, the modality represents stability and longevity for the institutional church. In contrast, the monastery sodality is a missiological construct that is transient and adaptable. Sodalities are often subject to, but not necessarily controlled by, the authority of modalities. A biblical example is Paul’s first missionary journey. He and Barnabas were the sodalic team sent by the modalic Antioch congregation. While Paul and Barnabas may have reported back to the Antioch church, they did not take orders from it. The sodalic team had autonomy and authority. It was a symbiotic relationship. The responsibility and mission of the sodalic team was to build local modalic congregations throughout the Roman

\textsuperscript{370} Winters, “The Two Structures,” 181. Winters is fully aware of the encumbrance of the term ‘monastic’ in post-Reformation thinking. During the more than thousand years of monastic culture, “there is no denying the fact that apart from this structure it would be hard even to imagine the vital continuity of the Christian tradition across the centuries” (182). In other words, it was the monasteries which were primarily responsible for the Christendom expansion into unreached people groups.

\textsuperscript{371} Winter, “The Two Structures,” 182.

\textsuperscript{372} Hugh Halter and Matt Smay offer a brief summary of Winter’s ideas (Halter and Smay, \textit{AND}, 128-129). Modalities are most often associated with local congregations and denominations. Sodalities are most easily identified with mission agencies (Church Resource Ministries, Christian Associates, or Greater European Missions), parachurch ministries (Youth For Christ, Cru,YWAM, Navigators, Young Life), independent evangelistic associations (Billy Graham, Luis Palau Association), church-planting initiatives (Exponential, Missio, Forge Network, Acts 29 Network), and social gospel organizations (World Vision, International Justice Mission). Modalities are highly local and place an emphasis on those who are already inside the church and place an emphasis on activities such as public worship, teaching, shepherding, and discipleship. Sodalities prioritize those outside the church and are characterized by words like: sending, missional, new works, movements, apostolic, and networks.
Empire who would then send and support new sodalities. The ecclesiological and missiological priorities were complementary. This pattern of “sodalities building modalities who supported sodalities” endured from the apostolic church into the Middle Ages. Still, ecclesiology was increasingly prioritized over missiology as increased emphasis was given to congregational meeting spaces, paid clergy, and corporate worship services as the main expression of faith and mission.373

With the Reformation, the priority of ecclesiology was maximized through a full-scale renewal movement of the local church (modality) without any regard for the sodality. This omission, in Winter’s assessment, is the greatest weakness of the Protestant tradition because it left virtually no mechanism for mission until three hundred years later when William Carey reintroduced the concept of sodality led mission. Without the balance offered by the sodality, the Protestant modality’s singular emphasis was an institution instinctively concerned with its own internal interests of preservation and growth, typically focusing on the modalic gifts of the teacher and shepherd without reference to the sodalic gifts of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists.374 Without balance, modalities have a natural tendency to move away from riskier, outward-focused mission structure. This is especially observed when church and denominational funds become scarce.375

As history demonstrates, mission is easily usurped under the weight of institution as care for insiders is favored over a sodalic concern for outsiders. Modalics are characteristically

content to limit mission to the few sodalics passionate to go. Modalics fund while sodalics spend, yet without an emphasis and passion for mission, there is little funding available. Modalics are inclined to measure success through addition. Even when modern modalities attempt to be missional, as when planting new churches, success is often measured by the modalic worship service attendance (addition) rather than how quickly the new church plants another (multiplication).\(^{376}\)

From a New Testament perspective, modalities and sodalities are both essential. Jesus’ Great Commission embraces the sodalic “Go to all nations” alongside the modalic “make disciples, teach them to obey.” The key is to recognize the “and” between these two ideas. Each pattern has its own advantage to kingdom expansion. Each pattern requires different spiritual gifting and calling (Rom 12:6-8, 1Cor 12:8-11, Eph 4:11-13, 1Pt 4:11). Problematic in the Western church has been the overemphasizing of the modality at the expense of the sodality. This exposes the need for a new 3.0 model that unites the modalic and sodalic expressions of the church.\(^{377}\) The microchurch is potentially one such model.

Reemphasizing Sodality Through the Microchurch

Christendom’s historic emphasis on modality has notable effect in the attractional model’s consumer-approach of offering church programs to meet the wants and needs of its constituents. In essence, the Western church tends toward being a vendor of religious goods and services available at the consumer’s disposal. Consequently, the church has become less a

\[^{376}\text{Paul reveals this strategy in 2Tm 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”}\]

\[^{377}\text{Halter and Smay, AND, 129.}\]
community of believers and more an “event” to experience or a building to inhabit. But in an affluent culture where entertainment is habitually pursued and easily acquired, and where consumables are easily purchased and discarded, satisfaction from another event or product is short-lived. Western culture has created a poverty of significance. People want to be part of an inter-dependent family that knows one another, cares for one another, and seeks to do something important together. Modern, attractional churches can provide education, polished teaching, riveting performances, and well-designed graphics to explain the mystery of the Kingdom. Yet, the number of those attending these churches is still declining as Postmoderns tend to find mystery more attractive than propositional answers. The journey is often more desirable than arriving at the destination. Organic, relational, missional expressions such as the microchurch offer sought-after participation in the mission rather than the disappointing expectation of merely spectating in the attractional model.

If Christendom is gasping its last breath, where is the church to go? Like all paradigm shifts, the twenty-first century is experiencing enormous transition resulting in deep uncertainty. Modern absolutes are evolving into postmodern doubts. Longstanding institutions from every sector are facing the necessity of change. The Western church which had benefited for centuries from a position of influence and power is rapidly losing this advantage and its presence

379 Cole, Church 3.0, 39-40 (Kindle).
380 Ibid, 49 (Kindle).
381 Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc 8486 (Kindle).
382 For instance, Adventists are recovering the long-neglected emphasis on the parousia. Mainline denominations are showing a renewed interest in the gifts of the Spirit. The Brethen have developed a church model without institutionalized, hierarchical offices. Denominations once isolated are sharing resources in cooperation in various mission projects. And various missional and microchurch movements are gaining momentum throughout the West. See Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc.8819 (Kindle).
can even be considered a liability rather than an asset. Whatever the benefits of Christendom, and no doubt there were many, the twenty-first century Western church no longer operates in Christendom. Unfortunately, it often is unaware of that reality and suffers as a result. But the promise rings true that Christ will build his Church and even the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Mt 16:18). The way forward does not disaffirm the past. Church 3.0 stands firmly on the shoulders of Church 1.0 and 2.0, and although the temptation for many is to go backwards, Church 3.0 must glean what it can from past models while allowing the Spirit to bring wisdom and creativity to shape culturally relevant models for today. Like the early church which was not limited to any one effective model as they were continually developing and adapting to new cultures and environments, so the church in post-Modernity and post-Christendom must seek to do today. The microchurch is one such expression of Church 3.0.

Contrasting microchurch and Attractional Church

The microchurch is one of many Church 3.0 models that seeks to employ some of the advantageous principles of the early church into a model that is more relevant for making disciples in the current postmodern, post-Christendom culture. Additional understanding of the microchurch is aided through a contrast with the prevalent attractional church model, especially concerning how the two respond to the ongoing transition from Modernity to Postmodernity.

383 Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc 8819 (Kindle).
384 Cole, Church 3.0, 99 (Kindle).
A Response to Consumerism

One of the primary characteristics of Western culture is consumerism, a distinction that has been embraced by the Western church.\textsuperscript{385} Consumerism is the antithesis of dying to self. In pursuit of what is gratifying in the present, the desire and ability to accrue lends to an aversion of the risk and discomfort associated with living out Jesus’ Kingdom-mission. Instead of leading the church into potential danger, attractional church leaders are duty-bound to provide safe, well-staffed programs and experiences of great worship that minister to the congregation’s felt needs. Instead of perceiving itself as a missional community, the Western church often limits its responsibilities to more inward benefits such as counseling, social services, administration, Bible studies, classes, and creative outlets for artistically oriented people to live out their passions. Typically, the bigger the church, the more modality-centered services it is expected to offer its members.\textsuperscript{386} Consumerism creates a faith that prioritizes God’s relationship to the individual’s needs and wants. Theology and missiology are weighed through the perspective of the self.\textsuperscript{387}

Neil Cole references the inward, self-centeredness of the Christendom church with the outward, other-centered nature of smaller, missional church communities like the microchurch.\textsuperscript{388} Contrasting the common Western objective security and success, the microchurch emphasizes a life fully abandoned to Jesus and his cause, even at the expense of the individual.\textsuperscript{389} While the attractional model “improves” the lives of church members and

\textsuperscript{385} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 108-109 (Kindle)
\textsuperscript{386} Halter and Smay, \textit{AND}, 74-75 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{387} Woodward and White, \textit{The Church as Movement}, 172 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{388} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 47-48 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{389} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 174 (Kindle).
attenders, the microchurch seeks to develop Christ followers who seek to bless the world in response to God’s mission as revealed in Christ. Christ formed the church as his embodiment on earth for the purpose of being sent as living sacrifices rather than perpetual consumers. The byproduct of sacrifice is the propagation of disciples living as the representation of God’s kingdom on earth. As stated in the Nicene Creed, the church is not merely sedentary, but is “one holy, catholic, apostolic church.” The church, by definition, is a sent sacrifice rather than an assembly of consumers.

The modern church’s proclivity towards consumerism is a result of culture as much as heart. The attractional model has typically operated like a franchise using relevant business principles. Successful churches often provide efficient systems that seek to attract unbelievers and convince them to believe in Christ and his Church. Salvations and baptisms are often celebrated as the highest measure of success without any further direction and empowerment. New converts are discipled into the same consumeristic ideals of making the church look more and more attractive to new consumers who attend, consume, and then invite others. The unspoken assumption is that the more skilled and beautiful people are, the more useful they are believed to be for ministry. This is antithetical to the ministry of Jesus who “chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” (1Cor 1:27). An unintended consequence of an attractional-based model is that when the church seeks to be attractive, it surrenders the actual

390 Cole, Church 3.0, 61.
391 Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” –Jn 20:21.
392 Cole, Church 3.0, 58 (Kindle). Halter and Smay, AND, 168 (Kindle).
393 Cole, Church 3.0, 48 (Kindle).
394 Moore and Wilson, Mega Multi Multiply, 78.
mission of helping people see how attractive Jesus is. As spectacle, the local church neglects to reveal its true identity as a family of variously gifted individuals participating together in the activity of God.

Contrasting the franchise pattern, the micro church is more like a boutique. It is less organized and systemized. Control is the defining difference between a franchise and a multiplicity of boutique operations that can serve in places where “homogenized” franchises cannot. Rather than an organization led by a small number of clergy for the sake of those who are already insiders, the microchurch returns to the purpose of a Body for the sake of outsiders, even at incredible personal expense. Halter and Smay succinctly upend the consumeristic tendencies of the church by stating that the “Church is God’s people intentionally committing to die together so that others can find his kingdom.”

As a small group of people who gather and scatter together for the advancement of God’s kingdom, they answer the call of ordinary people who have been transformed by Christ. There is much less dependence upon professionals, especially those who have made a name for themselves, resulting in a much greater demand for the gifts and talents of regular believers. This drives multiplicative expansion in contrast to the attractional model’s proclivity to popularize the few for the consumption of the many. Elevating the best performers has been missiologically devastating. The microchurch requires men and women who have been empowered to

395 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 48 (Kindle).
397 Sanders, *Microchurches*, 145 (Kindle).
398 Halter and Smay, *AND*, 47 (Kindle).
399 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 86 (Kindle).
400 Sanders, *Underground Church*, 188 (Kindle).
faithfully pour themselves into others who will pour themselves into others (2Tm 2:2). The microchurch seeks to minimize the role of the stage and instead emphasize the role of the living room. Leaders are not venders or salespeople, but teachers and influencers that empower others to utilize their God-given gifts and calling. That is discipleship. The microchurch offers creative control to much smaller families of people over what and how they lead. This is the breathtaking example that Jesus offered in the Great Commission when he empowered his disciples to go, without demanding how they go. Jesus gave his disciples the authority to diversify the face of the church.  

The Great Commission was not a command to create churches, but to make disciples. As disciples are made, churches are formed. Conversely, the Western paradigm is to plant and establish churches first in order to make disciples. But starting attractional churches is prohibitively expensive and thereby greatly limits the numbers of disciples made. Growth by addition is typically the only available option. The Western church invests billions of dollars each week for once-a-week events hoping to delight insiders and convince outsiders to become insiders. In his 2007 article “Doing the Math!,” J. Slack estimates the cost of reaching key cities in the United States using the traditional, attractional model at $63 billion for the city of Atlanta and over $418 billion for New York City. This is unreasonable, especially in light of much more economically feasible ways to reach cities. The microchurch offers faster methods that involve every believer at a fraction of the cost. Making disciples costs nothing more than the

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401 Sanders, *Underground Church*, 150 (Kindle).
402 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 50 (Kindle).
intentional giving of one’s life. Without requiring expensive buildings, technology, or marketing, the microchurch can fulfill the three-fold purpose of the church (worship, community, and mission). Rather than requiring substantial contributions to operate, money can be reallocated towards mission and ministry. Discipleship is not dependent upon a church-run program, but on the ministry done within and through the relational communities such as microchurches who already live within their surrounding communities.404

Uniting Evangelism and Discipleship

The attractional model’s emphasis on an event unintentionally leads to the pressure of an immediate decision to “accept Christ.” This neglects the gradual, ongoing process of becoming like Jesus more typical of the process of discipleship. The Gospels reveal that Peter, Thomas, and even Nicodemus went through a process in their growing understanding and commitment towards Jesus that included bad choices and unbelief. Attractional models attempt to engage outsiders by creating enough interest that they are persuaded to attend a church-led event or service with the hope of an immediate decision to pray a “sinners’ prayer” and “accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.” This denies them the process of walking with the church in faith-activities prior to salvation. And even still, the means for evangelism and discipleship are typically limited to what happens in a worship services as preachers address passive congregations hoping to inspire change in action or belief. Personal evangelism is often relegated to inviting people to attend the church service where they can hear the gospel from the preacher and hopefully respond. It is a highly impersonal phenomenon few in the early church would have recognized.

404 Cole, Church 3.0, 50 (Kindle).
The pattern reflected in that of Rom 12:4-8 and 1Cor 14 points to participation by all, even in the worship gathering, which continued into later generations, as alluded by Tertullian where gatherings included personal “exhortation, rebuke, and divine censure.”

Following Jesus’ alternative pattern, discipleship often precedes evangelism in the microchurch. Even before the disciples knew Jesus’ true identity, they were walking with him. Throughout the early church, friendship was a vital ingredient for coming to faith in Christ. The gospel was often shared one-on-one. This is the pattern the microchurch seeks to emulate as followers of Jesus engage with outsiders in their own territory and culture. Distinct from the attractional model, discipleship doesn’t begin with the unbeliever’s conformity to an unfamiliar religious culture. Discipleship begins with friendship. Discipleship in the microchurch model begins within a community that is often distinct from the organizational church. In a postmodern culture suspicious of organized institutions, especially religious ones, environments of authenticity and vulnerability are much more attractive. Microchurch communities offer relationship and personal growth separate from a formal institution. This is what outsiders are seeking. Instead of being separate from the world, the microchurch operates within the world. Growth is expected through interactivity and participation rather than through the academic methods of lecture and teaching. The Western methods are not necessarily wrong, they are just proving increasingly inadequate. And since methods are neither sacred nor biblically mandated,

407 Hugh and Halter, AND, 60-62 (Kindle).
408 Ibid, 59-60 (Kindle).
they must be subject to examination. As the microchurch shifts from a program-driven, clergy-led, addition-based, institutionalized approach to one that is simple, relational, and multiplication-based, the church becomes far less consumeristic in its expectations as more and more are discipled and grown as participants and leaders.

In addition, attractional churches often utilize buildings as a base from which to provide evangelism and discipleship services. The flow is designed for outsiders to move inward towards the base. Missional attempts are designed to eventually bring people to a church activity or church event. Success is measured by the number in attendance who are being served and discipleship is typically defined as those served becoming volunteers to help service others.

The missional paradigm of the Western church follows the pattern where an outsider is invited into the church community to observe the activities of the community. Rather than the Church “going into the world,” outsiders are first expected to accept and submit to the culture of the Church before choosing to follow Christ. Once belief is affirmed, it is expected to result in a change in behavior and conformity to the culture of the church leading to a new sense of belonging and inclusion.

While the attractional paradigm proved effective in the past, the segment of society interested and willing to do this is shrinking. The model is consistently being rejected by Millennials and Gen Z. As the postmodern, post-Christian culture expands, unbelievers are

409 Sanders, Microchurches, loc 507 (Kindle).
410 Cole, Church 3.0, 9 (Kindle).
411 Ibid, 47-8 (Kindle).
412 Ibid, 52 (Kindle).
showing less interest in the services offered by the institutional church. Cole satirically suggests that “the typical lost person sees only two things that church is good for: marrying and burying, and most are trying to avoid both.”

“If we are to reach people for Christ and to see them gathered into Christ-honoring and culture-affirming churches, we will have to deal with them within their culture and in terms of their worldview.” This is the task of missionaries. As Christendom is replaced by Post-Christendom, Western churches must awaken to their task of becoming missionaries within their own culture. This is a natural benefit of the microchurch model. It exchanges the emphasis from a weekly worship event designed to reach the masses to the creation of spiritual families that live within the culture of those to whom each family is called. Where Christendom invites the community to leave its culture to experience the gospel isolated from the community in which it lives, the microchurch lives out the gospel within the community it finds itself.

Participation by All

Microchurches also initiate new patterns of engagement with the community in common space. Invitations are towards relational proximity and inclusion in the family rather than organizational church activities. As promised to Abraham, all who choose to participate experience the blessing of the gospel together regardless of belief. Rather than following the pattern of progression in the attractional model from attendance to belief to inclusion, the microchurch inverts this trajectory beginning with inclusion into a new family which potentially

414 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 49 (Kindle).
leads to belief. This backwards process allows for the experience of the “one-anothers” described in the New Testament before there is any expectation for belief in the claims of the church. Microchurches offer more than just seeing a preview of God’s Kingdom on earth, they offer the opportunity to experience the Kingdom in community before believing. Microchurches are the church living out faith in Jesus in their everyday lives where mission is a natural extension of life with others. One’s identity as a missional disciple of Jesus is formed not through passive observation or academic development, but through formation that occurs from church life lived out together.

As a community, the microchurch shifts from a program-led and clergy-led organization to a more simple, relational organism that has the potential for exponential growth. Rather than being a vending machine of spiritual goods and services, it is a group of people who do the serving together. Rather than the church being relegated to a particular space to occupy and event to attend, it is a people to whom one belongs. The microchurch is a church that is authorized to celebrate the sacraments and decide how it will live out its faith as a community. Although it may be influenced by clergy and denominational structures, it is not under their control. This is one of the distinguishing factors between a microchurch and a church small group or ministry that submit to the vision and strategy of the supervising church. Strategy and vision are the responsibility of each microchurch. Each microchurch community decides to whom they are

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417 Ralph Moore, “Rise of the microchurch,” 32:00.
418 Beard, “Missional Discipleship,” 175.
419 Cole, *Church 3.0*, 11.
called to reach and serve while deciding the best strategy to do so.\textsuperscript{421} The larger church structure, including the network of other microchurches, are resources to help the microchurch accomplish the goals it has decided to seek. This is the means through which multiplication occurs. While Western churches are attending conferences and reading books about how to be relevant in their culture, the microchurch community is a people living out the eternally relevant Gospel in the culture in which they already live. As the calling of Jesus upon non-vocational leaders is recognized and celebrated, non-professional clergy are empowered to minister and lead.

Ordination is not limited to the seminary trained, but extends to all who are called as apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors (Eph 4:12) liberating many bright and capable leaders that are not constrained to “vocational ministry” as typically defined. Rather than pastors burning out in pursuit of a model of church that is neither biblically prescribed nor contextually desirable and where they are expected to fulfill all five of the APEST roles in Eph 4:12, these leaders are free to become disciple-makers and microchurch planters that more naturally extend their influence into the surrounding communities.\textsuperscript{422}

Eddie Gibbs refers to this empowering model as a “new paradigm church” that shifts from clergy to laity.\textsuperscript{423} The microchurch is noted for how quickly new believers are put in positions of leadership. Discipleship is not reliant on formal education and instead upon Jesus’ relational model of proximity. Jesus walked closely with his disciples for three years. This is also how the Apostle Paul formed leaders. He travelled with those he was discipling to create church communities which resemble the microchurch model much more than the attractional model.

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\textsuperscript{421} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc 145 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid, loc 167 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{423} Eddie Gibbs, \textit{ChurchNext}, 11.
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The autonomous churches that Paul started were then networked together with other churches. Paul would stay for a while and then leave the church in the hands of the leaders he had discipled.\(^\text{424}\) It was risky, but it grew exponentially. The relationship between control and kingdom multiplication is inversely related.\(^\text{425}\) In Acts 14:19-23, after being stoned and left for dead, Paul quickly went back into the city and appointed elders from among the disciples.\(^\text{426}\) He left these elders in charge and later wrote back to them, not to control them, but to influence them through praise, correction, and theological training based upon the relationship he had established. Although sent by the Church in Antioch, neither Paul nor the Antioch Church chose to control how each planted church lived out the gospel in their own context.\(^\text{427}\)

This lack of control is the strategic key to the power of the microchurch model. Rather than the Christendom disassociation of the clergy and laity, the microchurch is an extended family led by “laity.” Microchurches are typically planted by a leader who does not aspire to a full-time salary. Although meetings are conducted as part of church life, they are merely a means of living out worship, community, and mission. The microchurch is not defined by the meeting.\(^\text{428}\) Following Paul’s biblical pattern mentioned above in Ephesians 4:12, the microchurch model expects every believer to function as a minister doing the work of ministry. Rather than the predominant leader praying and receiving God’s vision for the community and casting it to the community, the community is encouraged to seek God’s vision together.\(^\text{429}\)

\(^{425}\) Hirsch, Reframation, 52 (Kindle). Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc.7328 (Kindle).
\(^{427}\) Moore and Wilson, Mega Multi Multiply, 34-35.
\(^{429}\) Cole, Church 3.0, 86-87.
Rather than “going to church” where songs are sung and sermons are heard, the microchurch creates an alternate expectation of participation and contribution. If God’s central way of reaching his world was to incarnate himself in Jesus, then as his ambassadors, his followers should likewise act incarnationally through a genuine identification and affinity with those they are attempting to reach.\(^ {430}\) The microchurch seeks to equip and empower every follower of Jesus to live incarnationally in the world for the sake of the world.

Transitioning from the attractional model to a the microchurch model is problematic because, foundationally, it is one of trust that extends beyond organizational structures. As a modality, the structures of attractional churches inherently isolate people from those outside the church community. Cole believes the explosive growth the church has historically experienced during times of persecution is due to its inability to create or sustain the structurally beneficial activities that often hinder mission—activities such as hiring professionals, buying and maintaining facilities, and creating and supporting programs designed for “church people.”\(^ {431}\) By necessity, the attractional model requires control. To attract outsiders, programs and marketing must be professional quality and therefore regulated by those who are most proficient. Yet, control and explosive multiplication have an inverse relationship. The church is always faced with the choice of which one to emphasize.\(^ {432}\)

As churches were planted in the book of Acts, the apostles seemed to exercise little control over the new churches. Paul planted, appointed leaders, and left. He wrote back to these congregations with encouragement and teaching but did not micromanage their affairs. Even in

\(^ {430}\) Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 142 (Kindle).
\(^ {431}\) Cole, *Church 3.0*, 68 (Kindle).
\(^ {432}\) Sanders, *Microchurches*, 174 (Kindle).
Jerusalem, the Twelve circulated throughout the church communities, but did not control them.\textsuperscript{433} Multiplication occurred to such an extent that Rome became a Christian nation within a few generations.\textsuperscript{434} If the church is to multiply, control must be released.\textsuperscript{435} Similarly, the microchurch thrives when regular believers are empowered and seek out ways in which needs can be met and then respond together to meet those needs. Everyone in the community is considered a minister of Christ whose responsibility it is to do the work of the kingdom through the empowerment and training of the leaders (Eph 4:11-13). Through a decentralized organizational structure, the potential for multiplication is maximized. Yet, a centralized network of microchurches offers synergistic value. The microchurch recognizes the value of professional leaders to lead and train non-professional microchurch leaders similar to Paul’s example. As Winter describes, the microchurch is the sodality united with the modality to offer the most potential for making disciples of all nations using a variety of methods to reach a variety of contexts and cultures.\textsuperscript{436}

Micro-Networks

The microchurch model is often mistakenly associated with the house church model. While similarly small and autonomous, the microchurch chooses to be connected to a large church consisting of a network of microchurches providing leadership and resources to

\textsuperscript{433} Viola, \textit{Finding Organic Church}, 27 (Kindle).

\textsuperscript{434} Many of Paul’s letters were a response to the issues that arose from the autonomy of the churches. Paul accuses the Galatian Christians of “turning to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6). In Gal 2:11-21, Paul describes the “men from James” who were presumably from Jerusalem who continually emphasized a Jewish Christianity. In 2Cor 2, Paul describes with deep sorrow a previous “painful visit” as a result of disunity and poor behavior. The letters to the churches in Revelation are also indicative of the church’s autonomy to continually accept or reject the gospel.

\textsuperscript{435} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, 150 (Kindle).

\textsuperscript{436} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.150 (Kindle).
strengthen and empower them, but unlike a ministry of a church that serves as an extension of the church, microchurches are served by the larger church. The large church does not set the agenda or strategy for the microchurches recognizing that each is best equipped to befriend and reach its indigenous culture. Each microchurch is essentially a church plant supported by the network. As part of this macro-network of microchurches, the potential impact is one of multiplication that extends far beyond any single local context. The microchurch model includes the large and small expressions of the church work synergistically to reproduce disciples both through multiplication. And since the microchurch expressions are started with very limited overhead, they can multiply rapidly. Moore expects this to “represent the next (and absolutely necessary) step in churches’ influence on American culture.”

The missional nature of the microchurch is, as Hirschman defines, one that “reflects a sensitivity to the changing culture and attempts to embrace an incarnational as opposed to an attractional expression of ministry.” Each microchurch community lives out the gospel within its cultural context with an intentional missionary posture, “rather than perpetuating an institutional commitment apart from its cultural context.” While this is the goal of a variety of missional models, it is the network of microchurches working together in a small and large capacity that makes it so effective in mission. For example, Hirschman describes the Tampa Underground as

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437 Ibid, loc 126 (Kindle).
439 Moore and Wilson, *Mega Multi Multiply*, 70.
440 Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form and Function,” 91.
“an agile network of small communities dedicated to mission.”

The benefit of the small community is the ability to bring the church into marginal areas where people are not drawn to the institutional church. The benefit of the larger church network is the additional resources that might not be available within any specific microchurch. Gittins defines the universal church as the embodiment of unique local expressions that each contribute to the universal expression.

The large expression of the Western, attractional church struggles to reproduce because it seeks to generalize people, yet there is no such thing as “generic people.” People are continuing to identify themselves less by ideology and more by their grand stories. As national identities and political allegiances wane, community is built around connecting points such as interest groups, race, sexual identity, politics and other ideologies.

The microchurch offers the ability to focus on the particularities of the various cultures in which it finds itself. The larger church often struggles to dialogue with multiple cultures, but a network of microchurches can dialogue and live out the gospel within a multitude of cultural frameworks.

It is important to note that the perpetuation of additional microchurches is merely the means to an end, not the end itself. The goal of the microchurch model, like all models, is contributing to the *missio Dei*, the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Rather than perceiving missions “over there,” the microchurch recognizes God’s desire to use his church to reach, restore, and heal people in their own context. The Church is never the objective,

442 Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form and Function are Redefining American Christianity,” 99.

443 Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 119-120.


445 Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 122.

it is the instrument and witness.\textsuperscript{447} As the church continually conforms to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) while living in its surrounding cultural context as ambassadors for reconciliation between God and humanity (2Cor 5:17-20), it is a witness of and the anticipation for the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{448} In a post-modern, post-Christendom world, the microchurch does this more effectively than the attractional model.

A microchurch on its own is an inadequate depiction of the church universal, but so is a centralized macrochurch. On its own, the largest church in the world is still a woefully inadequate representation of the kingdom of God. But taken together, hundreds, even thousands of microchurches touching every kind of need and serving every kind of person in one city is not only exciting, it is earth shattering. It is the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{449}

**Summary**

This chapter began by defining mission as one of discipleship through three irreducible minimums of the church: community, mission, and worship. The question the chapter sought to answer was, “How is this lived out in each particular culture?” The microchurch model empowers the localized leader and community to dream, create, and contextualize how to accomplish God’s missional directive.\textsuperscript{450} The mission of the church is a lived experience together in the surrounding community rather than a fixed attitude or pattern of set behaviors lived within a separate community.\textsuperscript{451} As demonstrated through the example of Jesus, the church is intended to be the Body of Christ, the incarnation in its surrounding culture.

\textsuperscript{447} Hirschman, “Missional Focus, Form and Function are Redefining American Christianity,” 92.
\textsuperscript{448} McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 39.
\textsuperscript{449} Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.2182 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{450} Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.150 (Kindle)
\textsuperscript{451} Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 48.
The Church has experienced centuries of privilege and power. From the Middle Ages through Modernity, it has assumed a cultural influence that has been lost in post-Modernity. Millennials and Gen. Z are less interested in consumer Christianity and the cost of attractional church is continuing to require more funds than are available. Invitations to attend services and events hosted by the institutional church will continue to be met with rising hostility, therefore requiring in-depth, ongoing relationships for conversations about faith to ensue.\textsuperscript{452}

This is where the attractional church has most often lost sight of its mission. It has been content to meander along with no clear sense of purpose or picture of success. Discipleship has been defined as increasing one’s knowledge rather than living out worship, community, and mission. Rather than defining the church by the \textit{missio Dei}, mission has simply become one of many tasks that a church does alongside the typical false benchmarks of right doctrine and ministry strategy.\textsuperscript{453} Solving this dilemma includes far more than doing the same things better. Something fundamentally new is required. When the church leaves its buildings and joins God in society, it begins to offer glimpses of God’s redemptive work “so heart-breakingly beautiful, so humble and powerful, that we are left forever changed.”\textsuperscript{454} When the disciple interacts with the surrounding community as Christ’s ambassador for the purpose of God’s glory and the partnership of his redemptive mission, that disciple is formed and transformed to more resemble Christ. God works in the disciple as he works through the disciple.

Microchurch ministry is decentralized and vibrant … and undoubtedly messy. It poses a choice—control or empowerment. Is the priority keeping a tight hold on the direction and

\textsuperscript{452} Moore and Wilson, \textit{Mega Multi Multiply}, 78.
\textsuperscript{454} Beard, \textit{Missional Discipleship}, 185.
strategies of the church or is it to empower and release all who follow Christ to fulfill the dreams God has instilled in their hearts? When people are released to dream, pray, and serve, it’s no longer the responsibility of paid church clergy to devise strategies for local ministry. Instead, people are expected to engage the culture in which they live.\textsuperscript{455} Rather than emphasizing an invitation to attend the large church gathering, emphasis is placed upon the believer’s own radical transformation that can pour out into profound impact in their communities. The microchurch allows for every individual to participate with God in the radical transformation of the believing community for the benefit of the non-believing community.\textsuperscript{456} It takes the emphasis away from church growth and shifts it to two questions: 1) Are disciples becoming like Jesus, and 2) are they a blessing to those outside the church? The biblical task is not to produce larger churches and expansive programs, it’s to make disciples whose primary objective is to live as ambassadors of Christ who provide impact in their domains of influence.\textsuperscript{457}

The world’s hope is the church living out Jesus’ command to go together and make disciples who are retelling the stories of exodus and redemption through their own lives and communities. Being a disciple of Jesus is to identify the deeper meaning of living as a chosen people who live out their faith by making friends with outsiders, throwing parties, opening homes, and serving together.\textsuperscript{458} This is discipleship lived out in mission. This is the goal of the microchurch, to focus smaller and allow the kingdom to expand in influence through relationships rather than events. The microchurch seeks to simplify organizational structures to

\textsuperscript{455} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 69 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid, 45 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{457} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 65 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{458} Gittins, \textit{Clouds}, 64. Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 206 (Kindle).
their most basic level allowing all to participate and use the gifts and passions that they have been given. The microchurch requires a radical redefinition of following Christ and impacting the world. Through modern technology, there is exponential opportunity to connect people into smaller communities and to share each other’s stories. For all that has been lost in the Western church today, there is so much hope. There has never been a greater opportunity to see the transformation of people, society, and the world. The true hope of the church is the continued presence and work of Jesus within his church described in his statements, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20) and “I will build my church” (Mt 16:18).

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459 Cole, Church 3.0, 91 (Kindle).
460 Roberts, Transformation, 14 (Kindle).
CHAPTER 5 – EVALUATING THE MICROCHURCH

Introduction

In the first three chapters of John’s Revelation, the living Jesus admonishes the seven churches, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says.” Each church is evaluated concerning their faithfulness to Jesus and his mission. While Jesus’ words to those original seven are relevant to the Western church, his reproach to the church in Sardis and Laodicea seem most pertinent; “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God” (Rev 3:1-2).

Though it is true that the Western church has been the impetus of mission throughout modern history and has created more resources and opportunities for evangelism and discipleship than any other in history, the Western church is nonetheless in decline. Like the church in Laodicea, the Western church perceives itself rich and in need of nothing. And Jesus responds, “But you do not realize you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev 3:15-17). It is time for the church to develop ears to hear what the Spirit is saying because the Spirit appears to be saying much. The church is undergoing a cultural and philosophical revolution exposing its impotence. It is time to “wake up!” and recognize God’s original intent for his church to bless the world as his representatives and instrument of restoration and salvation. The goal of this thesis has been to identify the missiological understanding and practice of the Western church (ch.2) and compare that to a biblical missiology (ch.3) in order to define the microchurch model.

as a means to recover and live out this mission (ch.4). The current chapter seeks to evaluate the microchurch’s efficacy in this task.

While the microchurch is considered a new strategy in much of the West, the model is not new. The early church could be labelled the story of the microchurch. Jesus’ and his twelve disciples portrayed the essence of a microchurch as did the Apostolic Church. Acts 4, for example, describes how the church was divided into smaller units who “met together in the temple courts [and] broke bread in their homes” (Acts 4:42-46). Acts 16 references Lydia, a new believer under the ministry of Paul and Silas, opening her home to groups of believers (Acts 16:15, 40). Crispus, in Acts 18, opened his home as a place of worship, community, and mission (18:8). Paul’s farewell in Romans 16 appears to list five or six networked microchurches that appear to never have met together in a public forum. While the church in Jerusalem eventually resembled what could be deemed an attractional-model, it was the exception. Rather than multiplying, its growth was limited to explosive addition until persecution scattered and multiplied the church. As successive generations of the Jerusalem church perpetually declined, the Gentile church grew exponentially throughout the Roman Empire. Since Gentiles were not welcomed in the synagogues, public meeting places were limited. The home-based microchurch model became the best viable option and facilitated its rapid expansion. In AD 100, there were approximately 25,000 Christians throughout the Roman Empire. By the time of Constantine just over two centuries later, there were an estimated 20 million Christians meeting in

463 Ibid.
464 Cole, Church 3.0, 100 (Kindle).
microchurches. Viola contrasts the Jewish model with the Gentile model using the term “inverted transplantation.” In the Jerusalem model, persecution was the trigger for one church to spread into many different cities creating many new churches. But in Paul’s model that included both Jews and Gentiles, he discipled believers in different churches who would then transplant themselves into a city to establish a new church.

Exponential growth through small, missional communities is not just limited to the early church. A similar account occurred in China in the twentieth century when Mao Zedong took power and initiated the systemic purge of religion from society. The Chinese church had been modeled after the Western church and was estimated at about 2 million when all foreign missionaries and ministers were banished and all church property seized. Public meetings of Christians were banned with most senior church leaders either killed or imprisoned. The subsequent persecution was one of the cruelest in history. After Mao’s death in 1976, as foreign missionaries and church officials were allowed back into the country, the expectation was a decimated church with very few weak and battered disciples remaining. Reality was far beyond anything expected. The Church had flourished beyond all expectation. Once the shackles of the Western consumer-model were removed, even amid persecution, disciple-making thrived. The population estimates at Mao’s death were approximated at 60 million Chinese Christians.

When considering the precipitous growth of the early church and the twentieth century Chinese church, two questions arise: “How did this happen?” and “Can it happen again?” These questions are the inspiration behind an evaluation of the microchurch model.

465 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.577 (Kindle).
466 Viola, Finding Organic Church, 40 (Kindle).
467 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 9 (Kindle).
Justification for Evaluating the microchurch

In his article “State of the American Church,” Ed Stetzer asserts that “Christianity is on the decline, Americans have given up on God, and the “Nones”—those who have no religious ties—are on the rise. It is indeed true that parts of the Christian Church in America are struggling, while a growing number of Americans are far from God.” 468 The Western church has proven ineffectual to the mission in which it has been called. Creative ideas and discernment are necessary to rise above the entrenched thinking that caused the current issues. 469 The ideas that led to the decline of Christianity cannot be employed to solve the problems created by this paradigm. 470 If the Western church continues to operate under a model established in the fourth century, it will continue along the same path Stetzer has observed and will result in the continual decline in church attendance with few disciples being made.

The shift from Christendom to post-Christendom is illuminating the need for reformation concerning how the gospel is lived out and communicated within Western culture. As the gospel interacts with each distinctive culture, a reframing is required concerning how the gospel is communicated within that culture. Hirsch proposes that the gospel must be reframed for every generation in order to respond to the unique questions with which each generation wrestles. 471 This need for “reframation” does not imply that the gospel has no definitive meaning. It is not an empty form into which each culture is at liberty to redefine. May it never be! The gospel is Jesus.

470 Hirsch, Forgotten Ways, 14 (Kindle).
471 Hirsch, Reframation, 23 (Kindle).
Christ as the fulfillment of God’s grand story. It is a proclamation that “The kingdom of God has come near,” and an invitation to “Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). Repent is not a condemnation for sin. It is an invitation for each person to turn from the kingdom in which they currently reside—a kingdom of sin, selfishness, and death—in exchange for the kingdom to which they were originally designed—God’s kingdom of love, community, and life.

Jesus is who he is, regardless of interpretation. But understanding who Jesus is always relies on one’s perception and the fundamental questions each culture asks. There is no perception of the gospel that is not embodied in a culture. Newbigin suggests that even the simplest verbal statement “Jesus is Lord” depends for its meaning on how the language and culture define the word ‘Lord.’ Every interpretation of the gospel is inherently embodied in culture.472 Cole describes this as a “song in our head when we read the Scriptures.”473 The result is that the community often hears what is playing in their heads more than what is actually written on the page. They see what they have always seen. This reveals the need for the witness of the whole Church, historically and geographically, to broaden any one cultural perspective and to reveal a more unblemished depiction of the gospel. It also exposes the typical unwillingness of the Western church to learn from the places in the world where exponential growth is happening regularly.474 True contextualization happens through the faithful community of Spirit-filled Christ followers committed to the Kingdom.475 Each generation must seek to recognize their embedded “songs” with the attitude of the Bereans who “received the message

472 Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, loc.2718 (Kindle).
473 Cole, Church 3.0, 3 (Kindle).
474 Ibid, loc.2873 (Kindle).
475 Ibid, loc.2900 (Kindle).
with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). If the very nature of the Church is misunderstood, than regardless of how many churches are planted, the impotence of the West will be perpetually duplicated.\footnote{Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.123 (Kindle).} Since there is no one biblically authorized way for organizing the Church, all organizational structures should therefore be subject to scrutiny.\footnote{Ibid, loc.507 (Kindle).}

In order to ensure the communicative effectiveness of the Church in a given culture, and because no one is exempt from wrestling with the sinful and self-centered nature, every generation should evaluate the version of the church it inherits. Every local church culture should submit itself to critique of other believing cultures. Every proposed expression of the church’s organizational structure and missionary endeavors should be tested on the basis of whether it can be accepted by the wider ecumenical family as an authentic expression of the gospel.\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{Open Secret}, 114 (Kindle)} This is an example of the advantage offered by the microchurch model. As the surrounding culture becomes increasingly less homogenous, various expressions of the gospel are required within close proximity. Within a single network of microchurches exists an unlimited number of cultural options working together as a cohesive Body. While each individual microchurch reflects the culture of its participants, each is connected to a network of culturally diverse microchurches expanding the perspective of all as they cooperate together and share in the ongoing mutual assessment of one another. This contrasts the attractional model which is limited...
in the scope of its diversity since leadership is typically restricted by necessity to those representing the majority.479

Discipleship as the Criteria for evaluating the microchurch

The calling of the church is not to become a “church-people,” but to become a “Kingdom-people.”480 Jesus defined the core task of a Kingdom-people as “going and making disciples” (Mt 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). Evaluating the microchurch necessitates an emphasis on both the quantity and quality of active citizens pursuing this mission and growing in Jesus’ likeness (Rom 8:29).481 This is the definition of discipleship lived out through God’s worshiping, communal, missional church.482

Traditional models have typically measured success on the basis of the number of consumers. Discipleship is often defined as attracting more attenders while expanding systems to meet the perceived needs of these attenders. This is a fatal flaw that misses the mark of investing in the formation of disciples who are equipped to form other disciples.483 The larger the church organization, the greater the need for control through a hierarchy of leadership. As more vocational leaders are required, the model becomes unsustainable as resources become less

479 Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, “Megachurch 2020: The Changing Reality in America’s Largest Churches” (Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2020). This study reveals that as megachurches are continuing to grow more racially diverse (58%, p.3), the percentage of leaders who are white is still 94% (p.37).

480 Bosch, Transforming Mission, loc.9155 (Kindle).

481 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 128 (Kindle).

482 Beard, Missional Discipleship, 177.

483 Wilson, Ferguson, and Hirsch, Becoming a Level 5 Church, 33.
available. When salaried church leaders are required to be the gatekeepers for teaching, leadership, and discipleship formation, the result is perpetual inadequacy since no one person can fulfill the calling of apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, and shepherd (Eph 2:20, 4:11-12).

An awareness is brewing “of an imminent reformation of global proportions” and are expressing that the current Western paradigm is preventing the church from being what God desires. Halter is convinced that the only way to overcome the deficiency of consumerism is to remove what people are consuming. The tension created leads to the eventual empowerment and engagement of the entire community as they struggle, process, and take ownership of personal and corporate maturity.

Rather than “come and see,” the microchurch emphasizes a new “go and be” methodology. Contrasting the church’s conventional organizational philosophy of “we can do it, you can help,” it counters, “You can do it, how can we help?” The function and purpose of every follower of Jesus is sought. All are fishers of people and called to make disciples who make disciples. Therefore, the criteria for evaluating the microchurch and any other church model must ultimately lead to this goal of multiplying disciples.

The microchurch combines the simplest form of the church, similar to a house church, while also incorporating the best elements of larger church organizations. Microchurches involve

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485 Simson, Houses that Change the World, xviii, 105.

486 Ibid, xiii.

487 Halter, AND, 81-82.

488 Moore, Mega, Multi, Multiply, 55.

small groups of people committed to developing a common life together in Christ within the surrounding communities God has called them to reach. The manner of worship is unique to each group as is their mutual ministry to one another and to their neighbors. Each person seeks to identify and utilize the particular gifts God has imparted as part of their maturing as a disciple. This creates opportunities for many unordained yet capable leaders to earn their living in the workplace while leading the church. And while each microchurch is viewed as an autonomous church, they choose to recognize the importance of congregating together and combining their resources to accomplish synergistically what they could never do alone.\textsuperscript{490}

The microchurch paradigm contrasts significantly with the ingrained expectation of traditional church attenders to consume. To provide what so many desire, the traditional church model is hard, expensive work that results in very little kingdom fruit.\textsuperscript{491} It should not be the responsibility of the church to feed information to attenders, but to mentor them into their own growing relationship with Christ which then overflows into the leading and mentoring of others. In other words, instead of providing services for others to consume, followers of Jesus are to walk alongside one another in a mutually beneficial relationship. They are to be incarnational. Jesus’ incarnation was an act of radical identification with all that it means to be human in order to save humanity (Jn 3:16-17). Jesus is quite literally the human image of God. Humanity can know and follow God because he has become human in Jesus. If Incarnation was God’s strategy for reaching the world, then as his ambassadors, incarnational living should be the most dominate characteristic of discipleship.\textsuperscript{492} In Jesus, God has offered the archetypal model of true

\textsuperscript{490} Ed Stetzer, \textit{Planting Missional Churches}, loc.2043 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{491} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.59 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{492} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 141-142 (Kindle).
humanity. Being a disciple is to be conformed to this image and live it out in the family-community, the Body, through the ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission. It is by these absolute minimums that the microchurch will be evaluated.

When learning chess, it is often advised to remove the Queen. When the game is understood and the Queen restored, the player has better learned to maximize the remaining pieces. For the Western church, the Sunday service is the Queen. It is the most powerful organizational tool available. And like amateurs playing chess, its overemphasis has resulted in the neglect and atrophy of the other available tools. Large gatherings of church attenders meet in buildings all throughout the West with a sign out front that says “church,” yet the ineffectiveness to go and make disciples, at times accompanied by an inability to even meet the minimum requirements for being a church, creates a people who lack the power and witness that Jesus intended. This is a reality of which churches are often unaware. Yet, as Modernity shifts to Post Modernity and Christendom shifts to Post-Christendom, these vulnerabilities are being exposed. With the extensive fracturing of public trust towards religious leaders, the diminishing connection and experience that Gen-X and Gen-Z has with the church, and the global COVID pandemic which began in 2020 which shut down all public gatherings around the world, the church’s Queen has been taken off the board. Those willing and interested in attending a weekly worship service has quickly diminished and the Church is being forced to redefine what it means to worship and live out its mission in community together. While feeling like an existential

493 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.1061 (Kindle).
threat, it offers an incredible opportunity to change the system.\footnote{Yang, Wegner, and Moore “Rise of the Microchurch,” 24:45.} New wineskins are needed for the new wine (Mt 9:17)

The microchurch is one such new wineskin. These small gatherings of people typically have no building called “the Church.” They have little overhead or infrastructural needs. Instead, they are free to be disciples fostering a burning desire to love and bless those in their surrounding community. They pray hard together and love one another while sacrificially dying to themselves for others.\footnote{Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.1061 (Kindle).} Each microchurch is free to determine the communities to whom they serve and the culturally relevant approaches to do so. No culture is exempt. Microchurches offer inclusion of every culture and gifting as an expression of God’s desire to reach every culture. All are participators loving one another and serving the world as a community surrendered to the lordship of Jesus, each person participating in a small piece of God’s mission to the world. And they do this together, not just within a specific microchurch, but in a network of microchurches each committed to live out the ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission.\footnote{Ibid, loc.333 (Kindle).} For the Tampa Underground, a microchurch network that was formed in 2006, this is portrayed in four well-defined commitments that offer a helpful pattern: 1) Help people surrender their whole lives to Jesus as Lord, 2) Help people find their calling, 3) Connect people to a community who share that calling, and 4) Engage evil in all its forms with prayerful action.\footnote{Sanders, \textit{Underground Church}, 181 (Kindle).}
Evaluating Worship

In the New Testament, worship is never defined by one’s attendance in a church service. While there were regular gatherings of the church, they were radically different from modern attractional services. The context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 demonstrates that gatherings were not designed for those outside the church. Although unbelievers were often present, they were not the focus. Neither was an emphasis on the delivery of a sermon while the congregation passively listened. The notion of a stage-focused gathering was alien to the early Christians. Instead, the expectation was for all to participate in the corporate worship of Jesus and the shared building of the Body of Christ (1Cor 14:26). Leaders did not take center stage and teaching was not the responsibility of a single leader. Instead, every member had the right, privilege, and responsibility to contribute through their gifting to minister to the fellowship.

Peter’s relationship with Jesus and his development as a disciple offers a helpful pattern in evaluating the ecclesial minimum of worship within the microchurch. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, Peter was likely familiar with Jesus when he was initially invited to “come and see” (John 1:39-42) a full year before he was called to “Follow Me” (Mt 4:19). Although initially unaware of Jesus’ deity, as Peter spent more time with Jesus, he and the other disciples eventually “worshiped Jesus, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (Mt 14:33). Although Peter witnessed Jesus’ interaction with Samaritans and Gentiles, it was only after the resurrection that Jesus commanded the disciples to go into all the world (Mt 28:19-20). Their initial understanding of the Great Commission was likely understood as a mandate to seek out all the

498 Viola, Reimagining Church, 49-51 (Kindle).
499 Viola, Reimagining Church, 52 (Kindle).
Jews in foreign lands to make known their risen Messiah. It was still another couple of years before Peter received a vision to go into a Gentile’s house to share the gospel with Cornelius and his family and friends (Acts 10:19-23). Discipleship was a process where worship and mission were not simultaneous, nor was worship limited to corporate teaching and singing with the aim being a decision to pray and “accept Jesus” in order to attain salvation. Worship was one’s continual lifestyle which encompassed personal and communal devotion to Jesus. It was the constant decision to allow Jesus’s Kingdom to reign in the believer. Worship was defined as submitting to Jesus and being transformed into his likeness by living out the command to love others and make disciples throughout the world. Worship is a continuing journey with Jesus and inviting others to join the journey of continually integrating him into their individual lives, the life of the church, and their relationship with the world. Discipleship does not begin at conversion. It is a process that begins with relationship with people as a witness to Jesus.

Since Jesus came to “seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10), worship is incorporating Jesus’ mission as one’s own within a community of disciples who are compelled to go and make disciples. It is a lifestyle. The West has specialized in singing passionate songs, preaching powerful sermons, and discussing the Bible together. If these were capable of producing a movement of disciples, it seems they would have done so by now. Yet, the organizational worship activities of the attractional church have proven ineffective. Jesus commanded his church to teach disciples to obey Jesus as Lord. When the church attempts this from a stage, it inevitably fails. It requires interpersonal, mentoring relationships. This is the strength of the

500 Wilson, Ferguson, Hirsch, Becoming a Level 5 Church, 49.
502 Wilson, Ferguson, Hirsch, Becoming a Level 5 Church, 50.
microchurch. When worship is defined with the high production values of the organized church, the microchurch often seems destined for awkwardness and inadequacy. But when worship is characterized by smaller faith-communities committed to one another and dedicated to conforming to the ways of Jesus, it resembles the methods of Jesus and has the potential to more effectively develop disciples.\(^{503}\) The purpose of any gathering of believers is more than mutual edification, it is to lift up Jesus Christ and make him visible through the love shown to one another and the surrounding community.\(^{504}\) The microchurch is committed to being small, simple, and vulnerable. As sin is confessed and brokenness exposed together, it is simply another reminder of each person’s need for Jesus. Superficial relationships common to larger gathering become impossible as lives are lived in close proximity. Warmth, honesty, friendship, and love are pursued alongside the day to day frustrations that accompany intimate relationships. Sanders describes microchurches as allowing for “an aesthetic appreciation for imperfection”\(^{505}\) along with a “dependence upon the power of God to move in the gatherings.”\(^{506}\) The microchurch redirects the immense resources typically spent on the “Sunday show” towards meeting needs in the lives of those in and around the surrounding community. The microchurch does not imply that beautiful, moving worship services have no value. They can and often do, but when the worship service is the primary means of accomplishing the church’s purpose and activity, it is inferior to the microchurch in accomplishing the mission of making and reproducing disciples.\(^{507}\)

\(^{503}\) Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.767 (Kindle).

\(^{504}\) Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 59-60 (Kindle).

\(^{505}\) Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.244 (Kindle).

\(^{506}\) Ibid, loc.275 (Kindle).

\(^{507}\) Ibid, loc.363 (Kindle)
The place in which disciples are forged is the altar of surrender and submission. This happens not in the “house of worship,” but in the “crucible of mission.” Microchurches in the Tampa Underground are organized in a network around the hub church whose role is to offer “love, community, support, and accountability for those who go.” The centralized church sets the moral and practical standards for leadership, yet they have no control over the mission and strategy of each microchurch to live out the Kingdom in their surrounding culture. As a result, every microchurch participant lives out their mission as missionaries in community. Sanders describes the difference concerning how missionaries worship together from those in traditional church models:

I don’t think we have the best musicians or the most talented speakers, but there is a desperation and hunger that characterizes all our gatherings.... Maybe God always seems to be present because we express in our gatherings that we need him so much. Maybe it’s because we don’t have spectators; we only have participants. They don’t come to watch; they come to find God.

The people who gather to worship with us are spent. They don’t come to judge or consume, they come to find a moment with the living God; they come to be touched by him, revived, and reminded of his promised presence.

There are notable connections between Sanders’ comments and those recorded in Isaiah 58 where performance and religious activity define the consumeristic notion of worship in contrast with humility, love, mercy, and justice. The people complain, “Why have we fasted, and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” (vs.3). YHWH then lists his reasons for inattention and reframes what true worship looks like:

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.

508 Sanders, *Underground Church*, 59 (Kindle).
509 Sanders, *Underground Church*, 138-139.
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

YHWH then defines his promise for their repentance:

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

The similarities of the people in Isaiah 58 and the Western church are stark. Both characterize worship as religious activities rather than living out the purpose for which humanity was created, a partnership where God’s people are a blessing to the world. Worship services are good, they are just not good enough. The microchurch seeks to worship Jesus through the life of the community lived for him and his Kingdom. Worship is loving one another and meeting each other’s needs. It’s deciding together where to focus ministry together to bless their surrounding
community. The corporate singing, teaching, and discussion is an extension of love, mercy, and justice. While the microchurch’s presentation often falls short of even the most basic of production standards, the quality and number of genuine disciples that are formed is beyond comparison.510

**Evaluating Community**

Elie Wiesel stated that the reason “God made humankind [was] because God loves stories.”511 Stories have been told and sung by communities of people throughout history. The stories connected communities to their past while providing common direction for the future. Stories, myths, and fables bound communities together around shared values and beliefs. This ancient pattern persisted until it was eventually deconstructed by the Enlightenment where values would instead be based on what was considered accurate, rational, and scientifically true. And while much intellectual insight was gained as a result of this transition, the benefits must be weighed against all that was lost in the deficit of interconnectedness between families, faith-communities, and cultures.512

Stories are communal. They nurture the mutual experience of listening and truly hearing what is being communicated. Stories are slow to develop and require patience and genuine commitment to the other as subject.513 Stories are a journey travelled together, and as such are constructive metaphors for understanding the corporate aspect of discipleship. Contrary to

512 Gittens, *Clouds*, 53.
Western individualism, discipleship was never limited to a one-on-one relationship with Jesus. Discipleship requires both a centripetal movement of being drawn to Jesus combined with a centrifugal movement of being sent out together to continue the work of Jesus. All are invited into the family. All are the Prodigal Son for whom the Father was seeking. Following Jesus is living out the story of God in community and submitting to a community.

The New Testament idea of community was one of mutual exhortation by all (Heb 10:24-26) in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles submitted to one another and collaborated with one another. Though Paul received his direct mission from the risen Christ, he still submitted first to Barnabas (Acts 9:27, 11:25-26) and then to the apostles (Gal 2:1-2). Every one of Paul’s missionary journeys functioned within a collaborative team. Eusebius recounts that late in the Apostolic era, the Apostles divided the known world among themselves, each ministering in partnerships to their particular zone of influence. This collective idea of ministry is notably distinct from the idea of clergy vs lay ministry common today. Peter described all believers as a people and nation who function as priests offering up “spiritual sacrifices” to the Lord (1Pt 2:9). Paul utilized language that all believers are functioning members of Christ’s body (Rom 12:4-8) in the Church and the world. The idea of the priesthood of all believers was eventually lost in the Middle Ages and was not recovered until the Reformation. Unfortunately, the renewal of the concept limited the idea to soteriology at the exclusion of ecclesiology. In other words, it was limited to individual salvation rather than its role in the corporate church. This has led to ministry development being reduced to the spiritual and academic preparation of a few leaders.

who are the bottleneck for addition (at best) in the modern church in stark contrast to the multiplication of the early church that resulted from all working together for the Kingdom. Today, as lay-people are empowered to lead and serve, Kingdom work is typically focused on the individual’s ministry labor rather than cooperating within a “one-anothering community” for mission and ministry.\textsuperscript{515}

The first century gatherings were non-liturgical, non-ritualistic, and non-sacral gatherings. Those who had heard from the Holy Spirit were at liberty to share through their unique gifting. Every member of the Body was actively involved. Paul instructed the early church, “For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1Cor 14:31).\textsuperscript{516} Listening to and obeying the voice of God was intended to be normative for all who gathered. In this way, they are able to contribute to the expanding perspectives of the community. The power of God through Christ was never intended to be limited to a few clergy. It was intended to extend from the hands of ordinary believers equipped, empowered, and shepherded to do extraordinary things for God’s Kingdom.\textsuperscript{517} Each person was called to uniquely participate with God in his work in the community. Fulfilling the one-another’s was the dominant ingredient of their gatherings and was tied to Jesus’ “new command” to love one another as Jesus loved them (Jn 13:34-35). It was also the dominant ingredient in mission. As Jesus anticipated, it was the disciples love for one another and outsiders that drew the surrounding community to Christ. Their community together was the impulse for mission.\textsuperscript{518} The

\textsuperscript{515} Viola, \textit{Reimagining Church}, 55-58 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{516} Viola, \textit{Reimagining Church}, 52-53 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{517} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 63.
\textsuperscript{518} Gittens, \textit{Called to be Sent}, 49. Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.878 (Kindle).
natural flow of living life together was key both to reaching new disciples and the formation of existing disciples. It allowed person to adapt to the ebb and flow of the discipleship process and be responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The community was the incubator in which the Spirit worked in and through his people as they were formed into the image of Christ. It was learning and then living out what was learned. While it could be argued that the church service historically has been an effective front door to God’s kingdom, this is no longer true and was really never meant to play such a role. Relationship has always been the pathway to Christ. This is the ethos of community that the microchurch seeks to emulate.

Make no mistake, this kind of community was not easy. It was awkward and required a willingness to be vulnerable and exposed. It demanded intimacy and humility with a large capacity to forgive. Susceptibility and shared experiences are increasingly difficult as a community grows. These smaller communities that met in various houses provided an organic family dynamic of belonging and accountability. This was the deliberate means through which discipleship took place. Contrasting the seeker-church concept of a “church for others,” the early church was a “church with others.” And due to the dangers of meeting in large groups in Roman culture, as church communities outgrew the houses, they created new church communities in new houses.

519 Beard, Missional Discipleship, 181.
520 Ibid, 184.
521 Cole, Church 3.0, 30 (Kindle).
522 Simson, Houses that Change the World, 25.
523 Beard, Missional Discipleship, 184.
524 Bosch, Transforming Discipleship, loc.9075 (Kindle).
While microchurches more closely resemble the house gatherings of the early church, when they are discussed within an attractional paradigm they are often erroneously associated with the typical small group or Sunday School program. Programs like these typically gather for the purpose of community and Bible study but rarely include a function of mission. As such, they function as ministries of the church rather than the church itself. Sadly, while small groups are often implemented as the solution to the purpose of community, they routinely fail to truly connect people together. Rather than all participating in ministry to one another, small groups often mimic the larger church services as the leader does most of the preparation and teaching with the rest of the group consuming what is delivered. Frequently, small group attenders have little knowledge of what is happening in the lives of others in the group making it easy to come and go without truly knowing anyone or ever being known. Even when functioning as intended—fostering relationships and assimilating people new to the church—small group programs are characteristically ineffectual in producing and multiplying disciples. Western Christians have typically struggled to articulate the story of God in a way that brings clarity to their own longings and struggle to find their place in the world. This inability to recognize and respond to God’s work in and through them is what Walter Brueggemann refers to as a “crisis of interpretation” where followers of Jesus miss opportunities to speak, care, and lead others to him. There is a great need for the Western church to reconsider the importance of telling the

526 Roberts, Lessons from the East, 102-103 (Kindle).
527 Ibid, 103-104.
528 Walter Brueggemann, Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989), Introduction.
story how God speaks into Western culture. It’s not merely the Christian’s story of salvation and personal transformation, it is communicating Jesus’ vibrant story that recognizes and addresses the deepest longings of people and invites them into a new way of living which literally changes and transforms everything about them and their world. This invitation includes becoming part of a family community in which their story is incorporated into God’s much larger communal story.  

Unlike church small group ministries, microchurches are definitively and effectually the church. And while very different from the typical large gatherings that are characteristically defined as “church, the smaller offer the most potential to live out the ecclesial minimum of community. Microchurches provide better opportunities to live out Jesus’ command to love one another as he loved. They are a means through which the relational progression that Bonhoeffer calls “the shock of disillusionment” can occur as exposure, vulnerability, and acceptance can lead to the kind of community experienced in the early church. Every gathering of people begins with false expectations. It is working through these expectations over time that true community is forged. Small group ministries are often short-term, which limits the time necessary to overcome the false expectations and lead to the acceptance of pride and insecurity. Microchurches are more permanent communities where participation and humility

529 Hirsch, Reframation, 39.
530 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.479 (Kindle).
531 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community, trans. By John W. Dobertean (NY: HarperOne, 1954), 27. Bonhoeffer argues that true community is not possible until vulnerabilities are exposed and acceptance is extended.
532 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.103 (Kindle). Cole, Church 3.0, 28.
533 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.127 (Kindle).
are expected, even required. As a result, they are better at disciple-making because they are better at engaging Christ followers to love fellow believers and the world. 534 United around a passion for mission, bonds are created through mutual sacrifice and service. Microchurches encourage trust between those with different cultural backgrounds and traditions through the sharing of a new common story and through the mutual extension and reception of love and forgiveness. 535 This kind of community is rare and inviting since all can participate even before choosing faith, wrestling together with the deepest human questions concerning the nature of God, how to live out faith, and what living in the Kingdom looks like. 536

As the center of church activity shifts from religious buildings to the home, the corporate identity of the church also shifts from structures and ceremonies to the family-community of faith in Christ. In Judaism, the temple was the sanctified location of God’s presence. In Christ, the believing community has replaced the temple. 537 Christ’s presence is now recognized everywhere his followers gather together. This understanding was entirely unique to the Jewish Christians, for there was no other religious group in the first century who exclusively met in homes. 538 But this new kind of community fostered mutual participation (Rom 15:14, Heb 10:24-

534 Ibid, loc.478 (Kindle).
535 Roberts, Lessons from the East, 30.
536 Hirsch, Reframation, 34-35 (Kindle).
537 1Cor 3:16; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21–22. In his description of Pentecost, Luke describes God’s people as the Temple when “3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” This parallels the Hebrew understanding of God’s presence descending on Solomon’s Temple at its coronation when “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 2 The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. 3 When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks... (2Ch 7:1-3).
538 Viola, Reimagining Church, 86-87 (Kindle).
each believer exercising their unique God-given spiritual gifts (1Cor 14:26), the building together of a community in whom God dwells (Eph 2:21-22), mutual love and care for one another (Gal 6:1-2, James 5:16,19-20), and the observation of Communion together (1Cor 11).

Unfortunately, the communal aspect of the Eucharist was lost in Christendom as the meal disintegrated into a symbolic ritual that offered individuals little more than a sip of wine and a small wafer.\textsuperscript{539} As such, it lost the unprecedented and revolutionary reality of a redeemed people, irrespective of classes or caste, sharing a meal together with the constant expectation of Jesus’ presence among them.\textsuperscript{540} Microchurch communities offer the possibility of restoring the original expression of communion where all can again participate in a meal together with no distinction between Jew, Gentile, barbarian, or Scythian (Col 3:11). Microchurch communities extend grace for all who are broken and in need of the redemption and life Jesus offers.\textsuperscript{541} This is the image of the church living out its diversity in unity together. As Revelation asserts, “[All] the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it” (Rev 21:24-26).

\textbf{Evaluating Mission}

While the microchurch offers much benefit for the ecclesial minimums of worship and community, as shown above, its greatest advantage is the thoroughness in engaging participants in mission. The attractional model’s “come and see” approach emphasizes the engagement of

\textsuperscript{539} Viola, \textit{Reimagining Church}, 87-88 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{540} Simson, Houses that Change the World, 27.
\textsuperscript{541} Bauckham, \textit{Bible and Mission}, 109-110.
attenders in worship services with a secondary aim of connecting them in community. Mission is often limited to inviting others to church. Chapter three provided a series of benchmarks for the evaluation of whether the microchurch is an effective model for making disciples who worship together as they serve the world. These benchmarks will be the basis for evaluating the missional component of the microchurch.

Benchmark for Kingdom Posture of Weakness

Benchmark 1: Does the microchurch operate from a hopeful position of weakness and submission verses paternalism and power?

“The Western church has lost respect as a leader in mission by the rest of the world.”

Instead of focusing efforts to reach and multiply disciples in a post-Christendom world, its principal strategy has continued to emphasize evangelism by preaching salvation to crowds of believers hoping to attract and convert the few unconvinced who are in attendance. The Great Commission along with Paul’s interpretation in 2Tm 2:2 directs disciples to multiply themselves by making other disciples. Converts is an inadequate measure of success because a convert does not necessarily equate to a disciple. For example, the fruit of a flourishing apple tree is not an apple but another apple tree. Similarly, the fruit of a disciple is another disciple and the fruit of a flourishing church is the reproduction of the church. Therefore, the appropriate objective is mission to those outside the church and the development and maturity of those inside. The

542 Newbigin, Open Secret, 166 (Kindle).
543 Wilson, Ferguson, Hirsch, Becoming a Level 5 Church, 53.
544 Simson, Houses that Change the World, 16.
attractional model that aims at ministry to insiders seldom does mission well, even if that is its intention. But since microchurches are defined by their mission together, without mission there is no church.\textsuperscript{545} And the microchurch’s proximity to its surrounding community creates the natural platform for mission to take place as faith is lived out in the public square.\textsuperscript{546}

Mission requires the church find ways to communicate the message of the gospel to all cultures.\textsuperscript{547} The microchurch bridges the language and culture gap by empowering those already immersed in a culture and language to reach others who are like them. The model connects like-minded people who desire to work together towards a singular purpose in which they are uniquely passionate. It is this natural contextual understanding of each community that offers hope for effective communication and demonstration of the gospel to every culture and group.\textsuperscript{548}

When churches unilaterally advance their methods and strategies as the standard for church reproduction, they act pretentiously and pridefully.\textsuperscript{549} For years, Western church leaders have assumed the world was dependent upon their expertise in theology and missiology. While potentially true in the past, the Western church has remained a closed system. Missionaries have been sent to various countries, yet there has been little dialogue together resulting in a stagnate Western church. In contrast, the global church is seeing phenomenal growth, especially in Africa, Asia, and South America. Rather than continuing to export an ineffectual Christianity to the ends of the earth, it is time for the West to choose humility and begin importing strategies

\textsuperscript{545} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 180 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{546} Ibid, 185 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{547} Sanders, loc.495 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{549} Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, loc.9379 (Kindle).
from areas where the church is multiplying. It is time to ask questions about generational multiplication. A Philippine pastor asked a church planter in the United States a paradigm shifting question, “How will you build a church that lasts 1,000 years?” That is a long-term multiplication question.

The microchurch is a model commonly utilized by those experiencing explosive growth throughout the world. It is a simple model, but it is not an easy model. It is an expression of the church that will require trust and humility as the power of the clergy is released to the laity. But what is the alternative? Referencing the established paradigm, Bonhoeffer stated that, “He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.” It is the same with mission. The West has seemingly dedicated itself to its own disciple-making models instead of actually making disciples that reproduce, and as a result is no longer making disciples. The Western church must always be open to renewal and reform, not just concerning church organizational structures, but also in the way it engages the world.

Western Christianity has typically created a culture of separation from the culture of those in the surrounding community. Often the only opportunities through which the church engages culture is in response to a perceived attack on what the church values. This usually results in the church being caricatured and marginalized by the culture it is attacking. The church’s “us vs. them” approach has continually suppressed any chance for meaningful

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550 Roberts, Lessons from the East, 23 (Kindle).
551 Sanders, Underground Church, 225 (Kindle).
552 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 27.
engagement.\textsuperscript{553} It has created a “good side” and “bad side” requiring one to choose a side before interaction can take place. Those who have chosen not to side with the church have typically felt excluded from the very people God intends to use as his voice and hands and feet. Instead of erecting walls and insisting a hearing in the public forum, the microchurch seeks to humbly build bridges and seek conversations as participants live out faith in their church community, in their jobs, their families, and with their neighbors. Instead of viewing unbelievers as “outsiders,” the goal of the microchurch is to create friends. When people know they are loved and desired to be heard, real relationships are formed in which disagreements are worked through. It is within these submissive and serving relationships that the Holy Spirit draws people to himself.\textsuperscript{554}

Benchmark for Mutuality of Kingdom and Mission

\textit{Benchmark 2: Does the microchurch model encourage decentralized empowerment for individual communities to determine how to best engage culture?}

Roxburgh defines the task of engaging culture as developing a “missional imagination” centered in God’s desire to reach the nations.\textsuperscript{555} The goal of this missional imagination is not to make the church more attractive in order to appeal to bigger crowds. Neither is it a congregation working to gain respect in the community. These are not bad things, of course, but they are not the focus of God’s Kingdom-dream. God is at work in the world in ways that are bigger than the church. As a church community develops a missional imagination, they seek not only to begin

\textsuperscript{553} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 115-116 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{554} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 125-126 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{555} Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One} (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2009), 22 (Scribd).
new works, but to join God where he is already working.\textsuperscript{556} The church is called to be a witness and foretaste of God’s Kingdom ways, but the church is not the end goal. Neither is the church intended to be in charge of God’s mission. The church is the conduit of mission. It is called to be a servant of the mission and a witness pointing to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. The Spirit is calling the church to extend its view outside itself to see and join God’s work in the world.\textsuperscript{557} Society’s growing disinterest for the church along with the increased spending necessary to reach fewer and fewer people is prompting church leaders to realize the need for a renewed missional imagination to “stop bringing the people to the church, and start bringing the church to the people.”\textsuperscript{558}

This type of missional strategy requires the release of control. This is difficult in the attractional model because to actually be “attractional” takes a lot of skill and money, usually procured through hired professionals. Due to the high cost of maintaining the buildings and staff required to provide attractive services, churches are often limited to attracting the biggest pool of unreached people while neglecting more eclectic groups. This has resulted in vast numbers of diverse people left unsought and unreached. The answer to this dilemma is the mobilization of all believers. No mission strategy will reach every kind of person except the strategy that mobilizes every kind of person.\textsuperscript{559} The microchurch is such a strategy as it entrusts people to determine who they pursue and the method for doing so. Authority and resources are extended to

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\textsuperscript{556} Beard, \textit{Missional Discipleship}, 191-192.
\textsuperscript{557} Gittins, \textit{Called to be Sent}, 190. Roxburgh and Brown, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 18-22 (Scribd).
\textsuperscript{558} Simson, \textit{Houses that Change the World}, xxi-xxii.
\textsuperscript{559} Sanders, \textit{Underground Church}, 78 (Kindle). Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, loc.9191 (Kindle).
\end{flushleft}
microchurches resulting in a “multiethnic, multi-ideological, and multi-doctrinal community.”  

The releasing of control is an act of faith as it trusts God to work in his people which is exactly God’s strategy for ongoing multiplication and disciple-making.

As a grassroots model, each microchurch autonomously decides what the ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission look like. In the Tampa Underground, each microchurch decides who leads and how it is led. The objective is to release and empower all five of the APEST functions listed Ephesians 4:11-12. The Western church has been built on the modalic foundation of pastors and teachers, yet apostles are uniquely gifted to establish the sodalic direction and pattern of the church. By nature, the apostolic gifting is one that ensures the church remains sent, yet this ministry is the one most lacking in the traditional model. The five-fold ministries are meant to function in harmony and to complement one another. Since the limitation of resources is less a factor, the microchurch is not bound to one or two leaders and allows for a variety of leadership gifts to be expressed. Microchurches are risky and often messy, but they also lends towards experimentation and bringing God’s kingdom-ways to dark places the attractional church could never go. The microchurch expectation is that all are called. Rather than the traditional question, “Are you called to ministry?,” the microchurch emphasizes the more appropriate question, “What ministry does God have for you?” While the traditional

560 Ibid, 140-141.
561 Sanders, Underground Church, 131 (Kindle).
562 The APEST functions are Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd/Pastor, and Teacher. For a summary, see Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 189 (Kindle). For a comprehensive study, see Alan Hirsch, 5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ (100movements.com, 2017).
563 Simson, Houses that Change the World, 120.
564 Ibid, 199.
church seeks ways to entice people into the church, the microchurch thinks about how to be enticing (salt, light) to the world.\(^{565}\) The microchurch frees all normal, unordained disciples to do ministry without the financial constraints and expectations of the mother church. The result is an unlimited number of ways the Kingdom is lived out in the surrounding community.\(^{566}\)

Benchmarks for the Medium of Mission

*Benchmark 3: Is the microchurch model culturally relevant and easily adaptable?*

Early in Acts, the Jerusalem church exploded in numerical growth from about one hundred twenty disciples (Acts 1:15) to over 3,000 (Acts 2:41). It quickly exceeded 5,000 (Acts 4:4) and continued to increase rapidly from there (Acts 6:7). These were the last numbers mentioned outside of the church “growing daily in number” and the adding of a large number of Greeks and women (Acts 17:4). Due to persecution and the limitation of facilities large enough to hold a crowd, there were few large gatherings of believers at any one time. The early church was essentially a network of home-based communities. When the community grew too large to assemble in a single home, it simply multiplied and met in one or more other homes thus growing the network of sister churches (Acts 2:46; 20:20).\(^{567}\) When visiting India in the early twenty first century, Rob Wegner was shocked at the difference between his fast-growing Church in the U.S. and the growth he saw throughout India. His highly successful church was growing rapidly as people were continually added to a Sunday service. The church in India was


\(^{566}\) Moore and Wilson, *Mega Multi Multiply*, 62-64.

\(^{567}\) Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 85 (Kindle).
growing exponentially through decentralized microchurches that were reproducing themselves
while staying connected together in a network.\textsuperscript{568} There was no perceived interest in the size of
the network as long as it was continually reproducing.

This is the type of multiplication sought by the Tampa Underground microchurch
network. Founder Brian Sanders states,

“\begin{quote}
The metric the Underground cares most about is the number of microchurches formed....
More microchurches means disciples are being made. And this growth does not come
through our master planning or expert strategy, but by releasing the people of God to
handle the graces (or sacraments) of the church, taking them into the world and offering
them to the lost and the poor. As I have already explained, the microchurch concept is
entirely predicated on the idea of calling. For us, microchurches are not franchises (like
discipleship groups, house churches, or even scaled parachurch ministries); they are
customized and contextualized expressions of the church as unique as the people who
start them. They hold no particular brand identity with another church.\textsuperscript{569}
\end{quote}

When emphasis is placed on centralized church structures and authority, power is lost for
transformation and reproduction. When single church communities include hundreds or
thousands of people, a large amount of the resources and energy are consumed by large staff,
buildings, and infrastructure.\textsuperscript{570} Sanders concludes that the church in its most potent,
reproducible form is small.\textsuperscript{571} The microchurch is relevant and adaptable to every culture since it
seeks to be composed of those from every culture who are empowered to decide for themselves
how the community lives out the ecclesial minimums.

\textit{Benchmark 4: Does the microchurch model reflect qualities of Incarnation towards one another
as well as those outside the community?}

\textsuperscript{569} Sanders, \textit{Underground Church}, 89 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{570} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.494 (Kindle)
\textsuperscript{571} Sanders, \textit{Underground Church}, 70 (Kindle).
Matthew utilizes the Messianic title “Immanuel” from Isaiah 7:14. Jesus is “God with us.” He is God Incarnate; both human and divine. He is the embodiment of God who has chosen to dwell in the world through his church. Consequently, his followers should be characterized by an intense commitment to live in and among the people with whom Jesus lived—rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, and even (especially) those who suffer, who go hungry, and who endure injustice. The church was not designed to be an institution that outsiders are invited to attend. It was designed as God’s ambassador initiating the bringing of God’s blessing to the world. In the greatest act of spiritual influence in the world, Jesus offered up his life for the redemption of the world. His supreme act of sacrifice is the noncoercive power that continues to draw people and transform them.

Incarnational community is the starting point for all mission. Francis Chan states that “By myself, I can only speak of God’s love. With others, I have the opportunity to actually “show” love, forgiveness, and patience.” Only together is the church a priesthood. Only together is it the citizens of God’s Kingdom. The gospel speaks to human beings as members of communities which share a common language and culture. If the gospel is to make sense, it has to be communicated in a way that “makes sense” to that culture. As exemplified in the New Testament, very little apostolic ministry was done alone. Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs (Mk

572 Gittins, Reading the Clouds, 130.
573 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.507 (Kindle).
574 Ibid, loc.131 (Kindle).
575 Ibid, loc.534 (Kindle).
576 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 125 (Kindle).
577 Francis Chan, Forward to Neil Cole’s Church 3.0, loc.178 (Kindle).
578 Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, loc.2657 (Kindle).
Peter and John ministered together in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1ff; 4:1,13ff; 8:14ff). Paul and Barnabas were a team in Antioch and on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-15:35). Later, Paul teamed up with Silas (Acts 15:40-) while Barnabas joined Mark (Acts 15:39). As Paul sent out missionaries, they too were sent in pairs (Acts 19:22, 2Cor 8:16-18). Mission together was the natural impulse of the spiritual life.\(^{579}\)

The microchurch releases every follower of Jesus into their corporate missionary calling. It empowers each person to love and serve others as God’s answer to the corporate prayer for his Kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10).\(^{580}\) It is not an option whether the church cares for widows and orphans, the marginalized, and those in prison. Yet blessing the world and meeting the needs of a community are not typically hallmarks of Western church-goers. While church organizations often emphasize ministry in the community, it is typically a small fraction of the overall church who are involved in mission. The microchurch reflects the emphasis that followers of Jesus are a priesthood who introduce those in the surrounding community to God as a result of their own relationship with God (1Pt 2:9-10). Similar to Jesus’ incarnation in the world, the Church is designed to be Jesus’ tangible presence working through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, promising to build an assembly of his people to fulfill his purposes in the world. The microchurch is one such assembly. It is in this pursuit of his purposes that the church fulfills its destiny as his people.\(^{581}\)

\(^{579}\) Viola, *Finding Organic Church*, 44-45 (Kindle)


\(^{581}\) Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.1057 (Kindle).
Benchmarks for Recipient of Mission

**Benchmark 5: Does the microchurch model encourage proximity with unbelievers through culturally engaged relationships?**

Attractional church models commonly seek to create safe spaces to raise a family, grow in knowledge, and separate oneself from the evils of the world. A growing church is considered to be one that does this well enough to attract more and more who come and enjoy the benefits. A microchurch looks remarkably different. While safe, sanctified learning conditions are good, they are not the mission of God. The church exists for more. A typical Western church leader might ask, “Is my church growing through successful programs?” In contrast, a kingdom-focused network of microchurches would be more likely to inquire, “What impact is my church having in my city?” While many churches seek to provide a feeling of safety, this often results in a failure to be salt and light in the world around them. Safety is often contrary to mission. Mission recognizes that like Jesus’ body, the church is blessed to be broken and broken to be given. As a result, microchurches have the potential for much more risk since their community is often in the midst of the surrounding community.

While small group ministries are often identified by what the group is studying, microchurches are usually defined by the specific way the group seeks to live out the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Within the Tampa Underground is a microchurch called “The Well” that seeks to help the homeless. Another is “Honor One,” a microchurch that connects Asians

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582 Ibid.
583 Roberts, Lessons from the East, 41 (Kindle). Sanders, Microchurches, loc.429 (Kindle).
together with the hope of introducing them to Christ.585 "Mama Africana" is a microchurch that mentors school-age girls.586 There are several microchurches ministering to participants in the sex-industry and victims of sex-trafficking. One microchurch invites the surrounding community to a meal and in order to mentor and disciple people in the ways of Jesus.587 No two microchurches are the same. And while every microchurch seeks to live out the ecclesial minimums of worship and community, their identity is often defined by their common desire to bless those outside the church.588

The church was always meant to be dispersed and the microchurch is uniquely equipped to go anywhere. It is much easier to start, easier to lead, and much more adaptable than traditional models of church. The microchurch excels at the work of contextualization. It is a smaller, more flexible version of church and has the potential to be go anywhere and meet any need. While the microchurch does not deny the need for centralized church expressions, which it provides through its networks, each microchurch allows for the free expression of Jesus’ church in the world.589 It engages every believer in mission, asking each person to consider the part they will play in expanding the boundaries of God’s kingdom in the world.590 As a result, the microchurch is able to create niche ministries that even megachurches would struggle to afford.

585 Ibid, 11:43.
587 This microchurch is named “Kindred,” Ibid: 14:20.
588 McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 110. 1 Pt 2:11-12. “11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”
589 Sanders, Microchurches, loc.534 (Kindle).
590 Ibid, 1024.
Because people are released to pray and dream about how God could utilize them, the creativity that results is extensive.\textsuperscript{591}

\textit{Benchmark 6: Does the microchurch model provide structures for ongoing disciple-making?}

In 2015, missiologist Alan Roxburgh published research concerning the percentage of each generation in the U.S. still involved in church activities. With a high of 60% of church attendance for those born before 1945, the number drops dramatically with each succeeding generation: 40% of Baby Boomers (1946-1964), 20% of Gen X (1965-1983), and less than 10% of Millennials and Gen.Z.\textsuperscript{592} The various attractional models are straining to appeal to the declining percentages of each generation who are still interested in attending church. This leaves the large majority of the American population outside the reach of the local church.\textsuperscript{593} By singularly focusing evangelistic efforts on those interested in the church, the ever-increasing majority of Americans are being excluded.\textsuperscript{594} The Western Church must seek the Lord for a passion to “see” the previously unseen in order to bring Jesus to all in the national neighborhood. Western church is losing ground as the population of the world is multiplying while even the most successful churches are growing only through addition. The solution must include multiplying disciples without requiring professional training or beginning churches at exorbitant expense.\textsuperscript{595} Since fewer people are considering the “organized church” as a place to find spiritual

\textsuperscript{591} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 69 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{592} Alan Roxburgh, \textit{Joining God, Remaking the Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in our Time} (NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 6
\textsuperscript{593} Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, \textit{On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 333 (Scribd).
\textsuperscript{594} Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 30 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{595} Ibid, 252 (Kindle). Simson, \textit{Houses that Change the World}, xvii.
guidance, the paradigm must change from complex strategies by professionals to simple approaches which empower all believers to make and mature disciples.\textsuperscript{596} Cole asserts that 91\% of Americans have a relational connection with someone they believe is a Christian.\textsuperscript{597} Utilizing these relationships is the strategy of the microchurch.

Contrasting the inherent complexities of large church organizations such as the expenses and management of large staff and infrastructure, microchurches offer flexibility, adaptability, and scalability that is not limited by buildings or employees.\textsuperscript{598} Each microchurch can decide how they worship, what community looks like, and who they serve in the world around them. Money is not typically needed for meeting space since meetings are often in homes. There are few barriers which limit experimentation and change since microchurches also unleash the “laity” by elevating the responsibility and expectations of everyone in the church. In other words, there are far more ministers with much less expense.\textsuperscript{599} Throughout Christian history, most churches were formed with simple structures and expectations. But inevitably, as time passed and freedom permitted, the tendency was always towards increasing the institutional complexity of programs, property, and staff while meeting in larger groups under increasingly trained leadership.\textsuperscript{600} Similarly, tithing is typically intended for the same purpose as the ancient Jewish Temple tax. Like the Temple, attractional church is expensive in a culture which idolizes entertainment. As charitable giving continues to diminish, churches are struggling to continue the

\textsuperscript{596} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 113 (Kindle).

\textsuperscript{597} Cole, \textit{Church 3.0}, 29-30 (Kindle).

\textsuperscript{598} Todd Wilson, “The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication,” submitted to Church Multiplication Leaders associated with Exponential, April, 2017, 4.

\textsuperscript{599} Stetzer, \textit{Planting Missional Churches}, loc.2100 (Kindle).

\textsuperscript{600} Ibid, loc.2069 (Kindle).
ministries needed to attract people. Microchurches offer a very different and liberated financial system because it places a higher priority on multiplication than it does on presentation. Money often stays within the microchurch to be used for mission. Collections received by the central church exist to serve the microchurches. For example, effective stewardship of microchurches can benefit from professional accounting systems offered to all microchurches in a network. Meeting space, graphic design, printing, and coaching can also be offered. The hiring of professionally trained leaders and pastors is warranted if it serves the microchurches. Networks of microchurches can be well resourced by professionals who can train leaders to grow disciples and reproduce microchurches as Paul instructs Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2. This is fundamentally different from the attractional-model where money flows centrally to be used for the programs of the larger church. While this model will undoubtedly bring discomfort as consumable ministries of the larger church are potentially ended, additional funds can be made available for the mission of blessing the world and reproducing disciples.

Benchmark for Living out Mission in Community

Benchmark 7: Does the microchurch model emphasize mission being lived out in community.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he never betrays the dignity of people. Those to whom the world rejected, manipulated, and subordinated, Jesus honored and blessed. His was an outreach of healing and restoration to the rejected, marginalized, and those far from God. Contrasting the typical judgment and rejection of the religious leaders, Jesus touched the diseased and accepted

\[601\] Sanders, Microchurches, loc.2138 (Kindle).

\[602\] Moore and Wilson, Mega Multi Multiply, 50.
the sinful. He was at ease with strangers and sinners, regardless of race or background. This is exemplified in his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well described in John 4. She was considered an outsider who should not be approached by a Jewish man. But Jesus not only spoke with her, as a result of their conversation even stayed for several days in her village.

This is the posture the microchurch also seeks, bestowing a relationship of acceptance in humility to those in the surrounding community in which they live. Proximity leads to conversation and connection. It trusts God has been at work preparing the hearts of those to whom the gospel is shared. Ministry with and among the community often leads to diversity and multiethnicity. This is a hallmark of the microchurch community. Those who minister are deeply connected to the people to whom they are ministering. Communal hubs are formed that meet in publicly available locations such as houses, cafés, civic buildings, and even pubs. Success stems from availability to interact with the community on a frequent basis, rather than being limited to Sundays. The relationship, not the ministry schedule, is the simple hub of the new community. Unlike church programs, relationships are highly replicable.

Jesus was clear that one’s neighbor is the person God puts in their path. He demonstrated authentic spirituality as exocentric—extending, outreaching, embracing, and inclusive. A growing faith in Christ cannot be limited to one’s religious rule keeping and private devotion. This was the pattern of the Pharisees. Following Jesus demands compassion, social responsibility, and imagination as Jesus’ ambassadors who fulfill the promise of Abraham to

603 Gittins, *Reading the Clouds*, 124-5.
604 Sanders, *Underground Church*, 125 (Kindle).
bless the world. In Christ, truly there is “no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for all are one in Christ” (Gal 3:28).606

As stated in evaluation of community above, all church life is to be done in community. The ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission are inseparably intertwined. It is the task of each microchurch to decide together how they worship, what the community looks like, and how and to whom they seek to missionally identify. In other words, microchurches serve the world together as an expression of corporate worship as they live Jesus’ kingdom in their surrounding community. Without this community missional distinctive, there is no microchurch.

606 Gittins, Called to be Sent, 43-44.
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

In response to the decline of the efficacy of the Western church, the objective of this research has been twofold: 1) to determine whether the increasingly implemented microchurch model is a biblically appropriate missiological and ecclesiological expression of the church, and 2) if the model is more effectual than the current emphasis on the large gatherings typical of Western worship. Accomplishing the stated task required the identification of God’s purpose and ambition for humanity (Kingdom-mission) before determining if the current Western model is sufficiently living out God’s desired intention for his church. The study began with a summary of how God’s mission and kingdom were interpreted and realized in early Christianity and how this changed with the advent of Christendom. Historical context was necessary to clarify a theology of Kingdom, mission, and church by which the microchurch can be defined and evaluated as a biblical model functioning in a post-modern, post-Christendom world. Through careful examination, this research concludes that the current Western model is inherently deficient outside Christendom and that the microchurch model is a much more biblically appropriate and effective model that should be considered as an alternative for future church organizational structures.

For the purposes of this study, Neil Cole’s simplistic division of church history as Church 1.0 and 2.0 were beneficial in understanding the shift from early Christianity to Christendom summarized in chapter two. Prior to Christianity’s normalization as the religion of the Roman Empire, it was a counter-cultural movement that was constantly threatened by persecution and misunderstanding, but even in this contested environment, Christianity grew exponentially. Followers of Jesus created a surprising alternative society that raised an insatiable curiosity as they loved their enemies and broke all social status boundaries. This changed radically with the
arrival of Christendom in the fourth century when Christianity became associated with the power of the State. What developed was a culture that disconnected faith from other aspects of life and moved its expression into specific buildings set apart for religious activities. Participation of the masses was traded for mere attendance and work of the ministry was limited to a minority of professional clergy. Christendom would set a new trajectory that would last seventeen hundred years. Even with the Reformation, Christendom merely expanded into multiple expressions of Church 2.0. It is only through the current transition from modernity to postmodernity that the paradigm of Christendom is being fundamentally challenged and rejected. This is creating an environment with stark similarities to faith in the first century raising all kinds of new questions, or possibly re-raising old ones concerning the missional purpose of the church (missiology) and how it lives out this purpose (ecclesiology).

Chapter three sought to answer these missiological and ecclesiological questions with the goal of establishing the criteria by which the microchurch can be defined and evaluated. God’s story as revealed in the Bible is one of invitation where God is seeking and inviting humanity to return to him. Mission originates from the character of God. This is initially revealed in God’s sharing with humanity the responsibility to care for and fill creation, but is especially evident in God’s continual pursuit of a rebellious humanity epitomized through his promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. Mission precedes the church and is the purpose of the church which functions as the medium of God’s mission (missio Dei) to the world. In other words, the church does not have a mission, as if mission is one of its many objectives. Instead, the mission of God has a church. Missiology is inseparable from ecclesiology. In order to establish what missiological ecclesiology looks like, a variety of benchmarks are suggested. These benchmarks are listed separately in Appendix B.
Chapter four then offers a concise definition of the microchurch. It begins with the Great Commission’s call for “going and making disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19-20). Discipleship is the mode of mission intended to make one unified, participating people from the whole world. It characterizes the form and function of the microchurch as a gathering and scattering community. The microchurch is the church in its simplest form. It fulfills the three most elemental functions of what defines “church,” the ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission. The microchurch is a small worshiping community that defines itself by a common mission, but also chooses to be connected to a larger network of other microchurches for support, accountability, and expanded missional impact. Although resembling a hybrid of the house church model (individual microchurches) and large church gatherings (microchurch networks), several expectations set the microchurch apart. All followers of Christ are invited and expected to utilize their gifts and talents in various aspects of worship, community, and mission. All are ministers. There is little room for consumerism in a microchurch since the leadership is typically unpaid. Everyone is able and expected to participate in the interrelated elements of worship, community, and mission in contrast with attractional models that often isolate each as separate ministries. The microchurch also rekindles the sodalic, or sending expression of the church that was predominantly extinguished in the Reformation. This leads to a uniting of evangelism and discipleship through worshiping communities that live out their mission within the surrounding community. Rather than inviting someone to a church program, people are invited into friendships where faith is lived out together. Rather than hoping for a quick conversion resulting from a church program, microchurches allow outsiders the long journey of experiencing faith in community before deciding if they too want to follow Jesus. And finally, microchurches allow
for unlimited reproduction since the costs of meeting in homes is exponentially less than that of
the buildings and staff required by the typical Western model.

This thesis concludes with an evaluation of the microchurch. Ed Stetzer is correct in stating
that the ideas that led to the decline of Christianity cannot be employed to solve the
problems it created. New models must be created. The current transition to postmodernism and
post-Christendom has many similarities to the early church, and while a return to the first century
model is both unwise and impractical, there are principles from the first century which help to
evaluate the effectiveness of the microchurch model. Most significant of these is participation vs.
consumerism. Jesus does not call an institution of followers, but a community of followers to go
and make disciples. It was the responsibility of each person to “go together” and “make disciples
together.” The microchurch returns this expectation to the entire community instead of focusing
on a paid professional clergy to control and perform the ministry of discipleship through the
ecclesial minimums.

The microchurch also demands a redefinition of worship that extends beyond corporate
singing and teaching to include individuals in community being continually conformed to the
image of Christ. Smaller numbers in close proximity allow for increased mentorship and
vulnerability. The church is a family where inevitable conflict must be resolved and forgiveness
extended. Rather than the gospel being an experience to consume, it is expressed through
committed friendships with those inside and outside the church community. While Western
churches attempt to create programs for community development, successful ones are rare.
Within western Bible studies, there is little mutual submission and caring for one another. Since
microchurches are not expressed by a consistent program offered for the consumption of the
masses, it is the faith-practices of the community which bring them together. These include
communion, singing, teaching, eating meals together, and the caring for one another always directed by a missional emphasis, and it is mission where the microchurch offers its greatest advantage. Every microchurch is defined by its mission in its surrounding community. It rejects the separation from culture typical of Western church and engages the community as instruments of God’s blessing through a posture of submission and service. This model has initiated explosive growth in China, Africa, and South America. It is relevant and adaptable to every culture since it is composed of those from every culture—a community called into being, equipped by God, and sent into the world to testify to and participate in Christ’s continuing work in the world.

Whether churches and denominations choose to advance the microchurch model or a different model, the climate for Christianity in the West is tenuous unless specific action is taken. Stetzer writes, “The polls are in, and the news is bad for the Church in America. Christianity is on the decline, Americans have given up on God, and the “Nones” – those who have no religious ties – are on the rise.”607 The Western church resembles the first century in many ways, including the need for change. The writer of Hebrews urges the church toward maturity:

12 ... by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. –Heb 5:12.

Responding to this call for change requires not just doing things differently, but a humility to admit shortcomings and develop a teachable spirit. Despite its history of power and influence, Western theology and methodology is not superior. This is demonstrated by its

continual inability for multiplication. It’s time for a change—one that begins with a posture of humility. It is time to invite the leaders of multiplying church movements to influence Western seminaries, churches, and denominations. It is time to listen to the prophetic voices calling for change from consumer-oriented, egocentric strategies towards outward, missional ones that bless enemies and the least of these. It is time for deep examination of the church’s very identity to discover what it actually means to be a missional church living as God’s kingdom-community in the world. And it is time for fundamental changes that reorient the church towards a participating community of Great Commission Christ-followers instead of a ministry institution led by professionals. As Newbigin states, “the most important contribution which the Church can make to a new social order is to be itself a new social order.”

Despite the decline, there is cause for optimism. The numbers of books and articles communicating the church’s purpose as a missional, kingdom community has grown significantly during the writing of this thesis. And as a personal illustration, when I was in seminary in Ft. Worth in the mid-1990’s, I was continually frustrated in the difficulty to find a church with which to connect and serve. Churches were growing, yet I was disturbed with the expectation of the church as slightly more than a place to connect with friends, network for business, and receive a pep-talk from the Bible. There was little talk of mission to outsiders separate from a few programmed activities a couple times a year, but as many churches began to decline over the next several decades, attitudes began to change. There seems to be a renewed urgency to live out the calling of mission in the name of Christ as a preview of his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Organizations like Exponential, the Tampa and Kansas City

Underground, Deep Ellum, and a variety of others are leading the way to learn from multiplying leaders around the world to lead a movement of multiplication in the West.

The aim of this thesis has been the evaluation of the microchurch model in order to clarify whether it is a model worthy of investment. While completing this task and determining that the model is a very wise investment, what was unexpected is the value to other church models through the clarifying of the church’s purpose as a missional people lived out through the ecclesial minimums. Regardless of which model and strategy is chosen, hopefully a clear picture of the purpose for the church has been clarified. This should help in the development of a variety of missional strategies that culminate in culturally relevant and effectual church models. The hope also is that current, declining Western churches will be able to utilize these ideas to transition from consumer-based programs designed for attenders to become communities of participants where worship, community, and mission are inextricably intertwined and lived out in the surrounding community leading to a renewal of exponential growth throughout the West.
Appendix A – Defining Worship, Community, and Mission

As stated in chapter 4, the church is defined by three heuristics: Worship, Community, and Mission. All three are necessary for a community to be considered a church. Since terms can have multiple meanings, it is important that each be defined clearly in order for a proper understanding of the microchurch.

Worship

Typically, worship is the activity done in a church building by the people. Compared to the biblical understanding, this definition is extremely limited. A much broader and more accurate description is a life lived under the lordship of Jesus for the glory of Jesus. Worship in the New Testament involved singing and preaching but was never limited to such. Following Abraham’s example of traversing up Mount Moriah to sacrifice his only son “to worship” (Gen 22), the early Christians similarly were willing to betray themselves and their families to suffer the retribution of Caesar in order to remain loyal to King Jesus. There is nothing that should not and cannot be brought under his rule. Worship is the response to Jesus’ identity and activity, who he is and what he has done, reciprocating that love by offering one’s personal and corporate life to participate with Jesus in what he wants to do in the world. Following Jesus necessitates an entirely new way of viewing the world, in both spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). It is not just receiving Jesus’ grace, forgiveness, and salvation, but also his way. Paul explains, “to offer

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{609}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize Mt 15:8-9; Jn 4:23-24; Rom 12:1-3; Heb 13:15-16; 1Pt 2:9-10.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize Simson, Houses that Change the World, 46.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{610}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize Sanders, Microchurches, loc 645 (Kindle).}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{612}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize Sanders, Microchurches, loc 724 (Kindle).}\]
your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1-2). For Jesus, an appropriate relationship between his kingdom and that of the world is of greatest importance. Christ is King of both the church and the cosmos, but until it is fully realized, it is only in the Church that his kingship is acknowledged and confessed. Worship sets the Church apart from the world in its abandonment of everything that demands allegiance for the sake of Jesus alone (Luke 9:23, John 14:6, 14:26). While a very inclusive invitation—all are invited—Jesus’ expectation is very exclusive to him alone.

In its Roman context, to confess Jesus as Lord was a deeply subversive claim undermining Caesar’s rule. Even when not threatened by persecution, the early Christians were considered counter-cultural and mysterious within Roman culture. When Paul stood before Felix and defined himself as “a follower of the way,” it was quickly identified as a sect (Acts 24:14) with Paul deemed the “ringleader and a troublemaker” (Acts 24:5). Being considered anti-social and a troublemaker was not necessarily the required or preferred methodology of the early Church, but merely demonstrates the reality that the first century church did not define their identity as light and salt as enticing people to attend attractive services. Instead, they were known by their love for one another and their extreme willingness to serve others and even die for their worship of the resurrected King. “They were literally the most surprising alternative society, and their conduct raised an insatiable curiosity among the average Roman.”

613 Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 221-222.
615 Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, 44.
Worship is interwoven with the other ecclesial minimums of community and mission through relationship. It is the reality of the Trinity that is reflected in the ecclesial minimums of worship, community, and mission. Humanity’s relationship with one another and with God reflects the Trinitarian relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit’s relationship with one another and with humanity.\footnote{Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc.645 (Kindle).} Referring to Jesus, Paul quoted the prophet Joel that “all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13, Joel 2:32). Paul equated Jesus with YHWH, the covenant God of Israel.\footnote{Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 93.} This confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior is more than a simple affirmation of Jesus as Master and his followers as servants, it is a confession of communal identity. Jesus called his disciples “friends” (Jn 15:15) whom he served and loved (Mt 20:28, Jn 13:1-17, Jn 15:9). Submission to Jesus is reciprocal—Jesus’ followers submit to Jesus in the same way Jesus submitted to sin and death on their behalf. This is revealed in the commandment, “As I loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34). Jesus fundamentally refocused his community of followers to include the whole world (Mt 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). To love God is to love what he loves, and what he loves is people. Therefore, to be a disciple is to worship both individually and communally by authentically and consistently embodying the life, spirituality, teachings, and mission of Jesus the Lord and Founder through a relationship with his communal people.

Unfortunately, while many will attend Western churches on any given weekend, it is common to sing and learn without being discipled, loved, or even known. And most attractional church services do little to engage attenders in mission. The gathering of Christ-followers, rather
than framing a life of worship through community and mission, often substitutes spectacle which instead leads to the attenuation of all three. Western church growth strategies typically focus on successful worship services as the avenue for the establishment of the *ecclesial minimums*. Churches and denominational organizations often start worship services under the guise of planting churches. Yet, worship services do not change the world; empowered, impassioned disciples do. God has a unique way of preparing his people for participation in the kingdom through the work of transformation, which inevitably involves emptying, suffering, and loss. In contrast to the systems and programs offered in the West, Jesus offers a cross. Instead of the church existing for the benefit of its members and attenders, those who make up the church are sent in the power of his Spirit embodying Jesus’ character of servanthood as their own.

While theology and doctrine are specialties of the Western church, worship is defined through transformation of character derived from one’s abiding (Jn 15:1-8) and trust (Jn 14:1) in Jesus. The church is guided in its relationship and worship of Jesus through communal participation in prayer and interaction with the Scriptures which confront, convert, transform, and reform the community for faithful witness so that the message is never separate from actual life. Authentic worship is expressed in the daily living out one’s conviction that God is a

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620 Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc.139 (Kindle).
622 Rom 5:3-4; 2Cor 1:4-9, 4:16-18, 12:8-10; Jam 1:2-4; Heb 12:10.
625 Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 47.
loving creator who initiates, sustains, and restores his people through his willingness to be
known. Far from privatized spirituality and pious religious observances, worship calls those who
follow Jesus into a radical engagement with the world because that is who Jesus engaged.\textsuperscript{627} And
as the church embodies Jesus character, it becomes the instrument through which God’s kingdom
is revealed.\textsuperscript{628}

Community

The church is the fulfillment of what was promised to Abraham in Gen.12 and was
brought into being through Jesus.\textsuperscript{629} Despite Western tendencies, the church is not defined as
individuals who worship but a gathering or assembly (\textit{ecclesia}) of people worshiping together in
community. Jesus employed the secular term \textit{ecclesia} to define his community of deeply flawed,
yet beautifully authentic individuals who choose to serve and submit to one another (community)
as they collectively experience the presence and transformation of Jesus (worship), and embody
the presence of Jesus to the world (mission).\textsuperscript{630} The worshiping community has at its heart the
remembering and rehearsing of Jesus’ words and deeds as it shares together his death and
resurrection through fellowship, sacrifice, the Eucharist, and collective participation in
mission.\textsuperscript{631}

\textsuperscript{627} Gittins, \textit{Called to be Sent}, 48.
\textsuperscript{628} Schoon, \textit{Cultivating an Evangelistic Character}, 184 (Scribd).
\textsuperscript{630} Brian Sanders, \textit{Life in Intentional Christian Community} (Tampa, FL: Underground Media, 2015), loc
968 (Kindle). Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc 1024 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{631} Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralist Society}, loc 4236 (Kindle).
At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus connected the Shema (Deut 6:4-5) and Leviticus 19:18 in a paradigm altering golden rule as a two-command summary of the entire Law and Prophets to love God and love people. For first-century Pharisees who emphasized obedience to hundreds of laws and traditions, this condensing of the Law into two vague commands with no discernible means by which to measure success was undoubtedly infuriating. The religious leaders deemed it their responsibility to make sure the people did not fall back into the idolatrous ways of the past which led to exile and in their estimation delayed Messiah’s coming. Ambiguity was not valued and the indefinite nature of the Golden Rule would soon be made clear when Jesus reduced it further to what Andy Stanley calls the “Platinum Rule” further distilling the Law and Prophets into one primary commandment, “Love others as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).632

Furthermore, while Jewish tradition had tethered the Law to a love for and fear of God, Jesus seemingly equated himself with God by connecting this new command to himself and his demonstrations of love that included washing feet (Jn 13:3-15), healing the sick (Lk 5:12-26), eating with sinners (Lk 5:27-32), living among Gentiles (Jn 4:40), blessing powerful enemies (Mt 8:5-13), and finally laying down his life for those who crucified him (2Cor 5:14-15). “Jesus did not leverage his equality with God to stir [his followers] to action. He leveraged his love.”633 His new command was to love, no longer as one wants to be loved, but as he loved—a sacrificial love displayed by a complete unwillingness to leverage personal power or privilege for one’s own benefit. Every law and command in the Scriptures is subservient to this new law of Christ.

632 Stanley, Irresistible, 194-196 (Kindle).
633 Ibid, 198.
Every command and instruction written in the New Testament is the application of this new law of Christ. It is the basis for community in Christ.

The fundamental expression of this community is found in the Trinitarian distinctive of perfect, mutual love in fellowship between Father, Son, and Spirit. The creation of humanity in the image of God reflects this relational attribute of the Godhead. Humanity was designed to experience and participate in this same community, or communal-unity. Despite humanity’s brokenness and the sinful nature which has resulted in fragmentation and isolation, discipleship in Jesus is the return to the holiness and wholeness of community that results in the healing, reconciliation, and restoration of self, one’s relationship with God, and one another. This is shalom, the healing of every world system and the restoration of all that is broken in the universe. The community between God, saints, and sinners represents the restoration of Eden, the micro-Kingdom of God. Jesus’ dream of the kingdom is a dream of kingdom-community on mission through what Paul calls “the message of reconciliation” (2Cor 5:19).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other...” (Eph 4:31-32), not merely to obey the Law or the Prophets, but because “...just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph 4:32). Paul does not leverage the old

634 Jn 3:16-17; 17:23–25; 1Jn 4:8,16.
635 Stanley Grenz, Theology for the Community of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 179.
637 Sanders, Life in Intentional Christian Community, loc 244 (Kindle). See Mk 9:50, Lk 4:18-19 and Jn 14:27.
638 Sanders, Life in Intentional Community, loc 244 (Kindle).
covenant to establish a new standard for Christian morality. Instead, he bases Christian behavior on the sacrificial love of Jesus. The family of Jesus loves each other because God the Father through Christ the Son has loved them. John states this perfectly, “We should love one another.... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1Jn 3:11,16). Love is the basis of community. Everything that the community does—whether it be worship, community fellowship, or mission—everything extends from and is motivated by love.

The community of Jesus’ followers, therefore, is life shared in genuine love and with common purpose. It is within the church community where the truest longings of love are experienced through action, friendship, and belonging. Jesus has removed the separation between Jews and Gentiles who are no longer strangers (Eph 2:12) but are now fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s family (Eph 2:19). Community in Christ is one that goes beyond just reconciliation but becomes one of equity where there is no such thing as Jew or Greek, slave or free, even male or female. Instead, all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). All in Christ are new creation (2Cor 5:17). After Pentecost, God began constructing a new temple, not of stone, but a relational network of communities illuminating the centrality of love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even from the outset of his own conversion, Paul depended upon and submitted to the Christian community. Ananias received Paul at his own personal risk and through him Paul received the Spirit and confirmation of his calling (Acts 9:17-19; 22:12-16). It

639 Stanley, Irresistible, 205 (Kindle)
640 Sanders, Microchurches, loc 860 (Kindle).
641 Bosch, Witness to the World, 223-224.
642 Woodward and White, The Church as Movement, 172 (Kindle).
was upon Barnabas’ reputation that Paul was welcomed among the apostles (Acts 9:26-28).
Throughout Paul’s ministry he accepted the advice of the community (Acts 21:22-24), allowing
them to direct him out of danger in Thessalonica (Acts 17:13-15), and even accepting their
restraint in Ephesus (Acts 19:30). At risk of jeopardizing his authority and ministry, Paul
submitted to the apostolic leadership concerning his understanding of the gospel (Gal 2:1-2). 643
Paul did not minister alone. In Antioch and for the first missionary journey, he teamed with
Barnabas. Later, it was Silas, Timothy, Luke, Mark, and Lydia. Even while imprisoned, mission
and worship were always tied to a community. Paul spoke of the many gifts scattered among the
members of the community (1Cor 12:7-11) asserting each member’s need for the other and
responsibility to open up their very selves to the needs and weaknesses of one another.
Resurrection life is only found as those in Christ choose love and it is through this kind of
community of living life together that disciples are formed and sent. 644
Proximity is fundamental to shaping identity in Christ through the integration of worship
and mission (1Cor 12:12-14). 645 Community offers the necessary shift from individualism and
isolation to a unified, loving family of those in Christ in which friendship, mutual support, and
belonging are found. 646 It represents “togetherness” as lives are joined in reciprocal love and the
mandate of “otherness” leads to seek relationship with those outside the community. As Paul
exemplifies through training disciples in Ephesus, a key role of Christian leaders is the equipping

643 Viola, Finding Organic Church, 99 (Kindle)
644 Beard, “Missional Discipleship,” 181.
645 Gittins, Reading the Clouds, 190.
646 Beard, “Missional Discipleship,” 184. Sanders, Microchurches, loc 869 (Kindle).
of other leaders for the work of the Gospel. Paul exhorted Timothy to teach disciples who can teach other disciples (2Tm 2:2). While the Western church emphasizes the large group setting for this process, historically it has been through small group communities where this has been most effective through mentorship, presence, interaction, and guidance. It is in living out faith in the context of community where holistic transformation and discipleship is exercised in partnership with God and other disciples.

A formative aspect of the community as an expression of the Kingdom of God is the Eucharist. Jesus circumvented the typical first-century boundaries of table fellowship to communicate the inclusivity of the Kingdom as a new social order. In Roman culture, it was common to dine with other members of one’s district, class, or social origins, but not those of lesser status (i.e. freeborn Romans did not dine with former slaves). The social expectations of dining were similar in Jewish culture. Therefore, Jesus’ use of the table to express friendship with the lowliest, the sick, the poor, the sinners, and the religious outliers epitomized the Kingdom of God. It was a foreshadowing of the feast in the eschatological kingdom (Rev 19:9).

Continuing Jewish tradition, Jesus characterized God’s relationship to his people as joining together for a feast—God sharing blessing with his family and his family extending that blessing to one another. At the Last Supper, Jesus redefined the Passover meal to point to

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647 Cole, Church 3.0, 110 (Kindle). Viola, Finding Organic Church, 56 (Kindle)
650 Woodward and White, The Church as Movement, 174-176. Sanders, Life in Intentional Christian Community, loc 640 (Kindle)
himself. This meal represented the new covenant described by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31). Within the early church, shared meals became a wonderful picture of unity and love. “Every day they... broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). This is why Paul had such harsh words for Peter when he separated himself from eating with Gentiles when visited by “certain men [who] came from James” (Gal 2:11-12). This was an abandonment of the unity that Christ established.

In the latter half of the first century, documents such as the Didache and the Canon of Hippolytus reveal that the Lord’s Supper was not merely attached to a meal, it was a meal.652 In the rise of Christendom, however, the nature of a shared meal was typically abandoned for the symbolism of a wafer and sip of wine that was controlled by the clergy.653

As the communal understanding of the Eucharist is recaptured through the metaphor of a meal together, especially facilitated through smaller communities such as a microchurch, the community begins to experience deeper friendship, worship, and mission together as individual lives become increasingly intertwined with those outside the community. The missionary dimension of the Kingdom calls the church into otherness, to look outside of itself geographically and personally.654 Community is the vessel through which God carries the good news into the world. Unfortunately, most in the Western church have little experience with this kind of intimate and vulnerable sharing of life and corporate identity.655 The structures of the Western church are based on the same individualistic tendencies offered by Modernism. Yet,

652 Called a “love feast.”
653 Simson, Houses that Change the World, 55.
654 Gittins, Called to be Sent, 175.
when communities choose to promote community, they create greater opportunities of powerful witness to a lonely world that desires to be known and connected offering a family experience of acceptance and hope to people desperate to belong.\textsuperscript{656} This mode of family is where the anticipation of the Kingdom of God is truly experienced on earth as it is in heaven. Community is inseparable from mission because it is the context in which mission is lived out, transformation is observable, and healing is experienced.\textsuperscript{657}

Mission

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, he asked them to leave everything behind (Mt 4:18-22). These new disciples had no concept of Jesus’ true identity nor what the future held for them, so Jesus provided a small glimpse. Talking to fishermen, Jesus explained, “Come, follow me... and I will send you out to fish for people” (Mt 4:19). The invitation to follow Jesus was an invitation to do what Jesus came to do—to make his mission their mission—the \textit{missio Dei} revealed in the Hebrew scriptures to restore humanity, and all creation, to its original purpose and design. It was God seeking out humanity as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep (Lk 15:4-7) and a Father runs towards his Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). In the same way Jesus was fishing for disciples, they were being invited into Jesus’ story, which was God’s story, to fish for other people that would unexpectedly include tax-collectors, prostitutes, the infirm, and even Gentiles. In the same way that Jesus built this new community to serve missionally, the church today should do the same.\textsuperscript{658}

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\textsuperscript{656} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, loc 953 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{657} Sanders, \textit{Life in Intentional Christian Community}, loc 297 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{658} Ibid, loc 637 (Kindle).
It is the *missio Dei* that was initially revealed in creation through God’s self-giving and outreaching desire for his kingdom-authority to extend to humanity. Even in humanity’s rebellion, God repeatedly invites all people and all nations to return to him to be forgiven, reunited, reconnected, and restored.\(^{659}\) This is the story of God extended to Abraham and repeatedly to his descendant Israel, and was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus who invites the whole world to come to him (Mt 11:28-30). God’s love for the world is revealed through the church’s pouring out love for one another and the world.\(^{660}\) Participating in God’s missional, worshiping community is the “going and making disciples” of the Great Commission. Arguably, no passage of Scripture is more revealing of God’s mission than Jesus’ identification with the messianic expectation of Isaiah 61,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” --Lk 4:18-19.

Jesus is the *missio Dei* in human form anticipating the Year of Jubilee (Is 61:2), the Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus invites all to choose participation in his mission. While commonly perceived that the church has a mission, the more appropriate understanding is the mission of God has a church.\(^{661}\) It is God’s initiative rooted in his purposes to heal and restore creation. As God’s mission has unfolded in the history of his people across the centuries, it reached its revelatory climax in the incarnation of God’s work of salvation in Jesus’s ministry,

\[\text{Reference sources:}\]

\(^{659}\) Gittins, *Called to be Sent*, 15.

\(^{660}\) Sanders, *Microchurches*, loc 898 (Kindle). This is reflected in John 20:21 where the Father sends the Son and the Son sends his disciples.

\(^{661}\) Beard, “Missional Discipleship,” 191.
crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—an unfolding that continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{662}

Jesus was referencing Isaiah’s messianic depiction to describe himself as the fulfillment of God’s mission to proclaim good news to the poor, to liberate those in bondage, to heal the sick and to bring social justice to the distressed. In other words, to bring God’s kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. This is what the Messianic King does. All who follow King Jesus are expected to participate in these same activities.\textsuperscript{663} Mission is about engaging a world that is not as it should be. The kingdom of the world is full of every kind of evil, yet God’s desire is for the reality of his kingdom to be restored throughout the world. Joining God’s kingdom is therefore a surrendering of one’s life to the mission and purposes and family of the King.\textsuperscript{664} God’s mission is not so much the task of the church to change the world as it is to be an already changed community living in the world as a demonstration of what Christ desires to do everywhere. Jesus’ kingdom offers a better place and a better way in this world. This offer is revealed through God’s people embracing, living out, and proclaiming this better place and way.\textsuperscript{665}

Contrasting the small, broken, self-centered, victory-seeking kingdoms of humanity with God’s all-encompassing, whole, other-centered, strength-shown-in-weakness kingdom is a contrast worthy of witness. Jesus declared to his disciples that it would be the coming of the Holy Spirit upon his followers that would make this witness possible (Acts 1:18). The Spirit-

\textsuperscript{662} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 4.
\textsuperscript{663} Roberts, \textit{Lessons from the East}, 38 (Kindle).
\textsuperscript{664} Sanders, \textit{Microchurches}, 666 (Kindle).
filled followers of Jesus are a foretaste of and anticipation for the coming of God’s kingdom. The kingdom mission of Jesus is the climactic chapter of Israel’s story working toward the renewal of the whole creation. The early church continued the kingdom mission of Jesus as it was thrust out of Judaism into the world and now every succeeding generation of the Church is commissioned to participate in this continuing work of God within its varying contexts.

Jesus declared, “As the Father sent me” (Jn 20:21) in “humility and weakness” with a willingness to die to self (Ph 2:6-11), “so I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). Referencing Jesus’ identification with Isaiah 61, justice and peace is not marginal to the task of mission but is the heart of mission. The center of this redemptive mission is the salvific event of the cross. And while individual salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus is often the sole focus of the Western church’s mission, God’s redemptive mission goes beyond individual, soul-salvation. God’s redemptive mission is for the ultimate redemption and renewal of the entire broken world through the Church partnering with God to bring redemption to all broken places in creation.

Jesus exemplified this mission through a ministry which was always outgoing, embracing, and inclusive. Jesus’ mission and ministry were one and the same, and he promised to build his church in order to fulfill his purpose in the world. Jesus did not build a church so his followers would have a safe place to raise children, study the Bible, or protect the nation’s political agenda.

666 Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, loc 2578 (Kindle).
667 Bartholomew and Goheen, The Drama of Scripture, 287 (Scribd).
668 Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, loc 2301 (Kindle).
669 Ibid, loc 2604 (Kindle).
The mission of God is given a church that exists for more than merely gathering and growing. It is meant to scatter and share and heal and restore... and even die.671

As the incarnation of God, Jesus is literally the missio Dei extended to all of the earth.672 As Jesus was tangibly revealed to the world, so the Church is tangibly revealed. The incarnation was an “act of profound affinity, a radical identification with all that it means to be human—an act that unleashes all kinds of potential in the one being identified with.”673 As Jesus was God’s tangible presence in the world to reach the world, so should be the church. For it is in proximity with the world that the motive of incarnation, God’s revelation to his Creation, may be witnessed.674 As Jesus’ body, the Church is Jesus’ physical, missional presence on earth as demonstrated in Jesus’ calling the Twelve to follow him and join him in his “fishers of people” work. During their three years together, Jesus prepared his disciples for the mission (Mk 3:14, Lk 10:1). As the Father called, prepared, and sent the Son, so the Son called, prepared, and sent his disciples (Jn 17:18, 20:21).675 This is the meaning behind the term commissioned—Followers of Jesus are sent together as an incarnational community on a cooperative-mission with the Spirit.676 Simply stated, incarnational mission means that the church should be taken to the outsiders, rather than the outsiders taken to the church.677 The sent-church becomes the intentional embodiment of grace, holiness, and invitation—a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

671 Sanders, Microchurches, 1051. Gittins, Reading the Clouds, 33.
672 Gittins, Called to be Sent, 15-16.
673 Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways, 140 (Kindle).
675 Viola, Finding Organic Church, 80 (Kindle).
When the world is able to see the Church as an outward looking community that Jesus is forming rather than a building on the street corner, it sees a witness to God’s love and saving work. Rather than a service to attend, the sent-church offers restoration, belonging, and purpose to a broken world.678

But how is the church to live out its mission? Contextual application of the Kingdom of God proves difficult because it is constantly evolving. What was appropriate in the past may no longer express kingdom ideals. Various exhortations in the New Testament epistles that were culturally relevant in a first century Roman world are deemed irrelevant to modern, Western churches.679 Rather than listing normative behaviors for all Christians at all times, what Paul seems to demonstrate is the necessity of laboring to understand what behaviors reflect the Kingdom of God in the current culture.680 The church lives out its mission with eager anticipation until the Kingdom is realized, not to merely “fix” the world, but to reconcile it with Christ (2Cor 5:19-20).

The way of reconciliation is the way of community. In Christ, “you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Eph 2:18-19). The gathered ecclesia is the gathering together of Christ’s followers for the purpose of bearing witness to God’s love and inclusion.681 The mission is a communal, ecclesial undertaking that cannot be fulfilled by any singular person or position. It is not merely the work of the clergy, but the people of God together bearing the responsibility of worship,

678 Sanders, Microchurches, loc 1051 (Kindle).
679 Paul was prolific in his instruction to greet God’s people with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16, 1Cor 16:20, 2Cor 13:12, 1Th 5:26). Paul instructed men and women that their head covering was crucial to prayer (1Cor 11:4-7).
680 Bartholomew and Goheen, The Drama of Scripture, 292 (Scribd).
681 Sanders, Microchurches, loc 1057 (Kindle).
community, and mission. The challenge is for the people of faith to be continually transformed and matured to reflect the image of Christ working together in obedience to fulfilling the kingdom-mission. Paul exhorted followers of Christ to pay attention to how the church is perceived in the world. “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (Rom 12:17). Believers are urged to work hard “so that their daily life may win the respect of outsiders” (1Th 4:12). The witness of the church is to spill over into the public life of culture demonstrating the inclusive hope of the salvation of the age to come. It is being visible and involved in the life of the surrounding culture while avoiding conformity to the self-centeredness and leveraging of power that epitomizes the “pattern of this world” (Rom 12:2). It is as only as light and salt through weakness and humility that the Church can effectively fulfill its mandate to “seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10).

In many churches in the twenty first century, there has been a long tradition of perceiving Christ’s mission as a command to be grudgingly obeyed through relation-less confrontation and rationalization. A fresh understanding is helpful since the mission is not a new law. It is the gospel of restoration, life, and new creation. It is blessing for the sake of blessing. Like a mother giving birth to her baby, the pain of childbirth is overshadowed by the joy of the child in her arms (Jn 16:20-22). The writer of Hebrews explains that “for the joy set before [Christ] he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). If mission is done in the church’s power, the church is responsible for the results. But if

682 Gittins, *Reading the Clouds*, 41.
683 Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 287 (Scribd).
684 Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, loc 806 (Kindle).
the work is of the Spirit, the results are his responsibility. Since the Church has no power to save unbelievers from perishing, it is therefore free to be creative and relational and unhurried as it participates with God in his redemptive and restorative activity. Mission is not a burden; it is a privilege of sharing in the life and desire of the Trinity and his creation. It is a freedom which results in spiritual formation and identity transformation that is only possible in a community of fellow disciples. Understanding the new identity requires others speaking into one’s life. Therefore, Alan and Debra Hirsch suggest that all followers of Jesus should be involved in the process of disciple-making which includes pre-conversion evangelism as well as post-conversion mentoring. In other words, evangelism and discipleship are defined as helping people take the appropriate next step in following Jesus. They are synonyms on different sides of salvation—evangelism before, discipleship after. This mission-oriented concept of discipleship envisions spiritual formation and identity transformation being initiated before a person comes to faith in Christ, rather than after.

Kingdom mission offers engagement, integration, incarnation, involvement, and participation in what God is doing in the world. It is the way of love and the way of neighboring. It is the way of living in the world without being of the world. This is the way of Jesus. Newbigin affirms that “mission is the proclaiming of the Kingdom of the Father and concerns the rule of God over all that is.” And while this is true, mission is more than proclamation. It is

686 Ibid, loc 2224 (Kindle).
687 Gittins, Reading the Clouds, 34.
688 Hirsch and Hirsch, Untamed, 149.
689 Beard, “Missional Discipleship,” 182.
690 Newbigin, Open Secret, loc 1653 (Kindle).
invitation, friendship, submission, and humility. “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:10-11). And when the Church recognizes and lives out its mission, the great redemption of Revelation 21-22 promises the genuine expression of worship by a redeemed people from every tribe, language group, and nation who will give praise to God for what he has done for them and through them.691

Appendix B: List of Benchmarks

**Benchmark 1**: Kingdom Posture of Weakness - Does the microchurch operate from a hopeful position of weakness and submission verses paternalism and power?

**Benchmark 2**: Mutuality of Kingdom and Mission - Does the microchurch model encourage decentralized empowerment for individual communities to determine how to best engage culture?

**Benchmark 3**: Medium of mission - Is the microchurch model culturally relevant and easily adaptable?

**Benchmark 4**: Medium of Mission - Does the microchurch model reflect qualities of Incarnation towards one another as well as those outside the community?

**Benchmark 5**: Recipient of Mission - Does the microchurch model encourage proximity with unbelievers through culturally engaged relationships?

**Benchmark 6**: Mission In and To the World - Does the microchurch model provide structures for ongoing disciple-making?

**Benchmark 7**: Living out Mission in Community - Does the microchurch model emphasize mission being lived out in community.
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