





actually quite easy to denigrate Burning Man as a counterfeit religious experience, but Christians who content themselves with this will never understand what exactly draws participants to live under the Man's watchful gaze in Black Rock Desert. They will never discover what people today are searching for and thus will never offer the authentic spiritual experience that people crave. According to participants at this postmodern festival, six key elements make up the Burning Man experience.

*Belonging:* Says the official Burning Man web site,

You belong here and you participate. You're not the weirdest kid in the classroom—there's always somebody there who's thought up something you never even considered. You're there to breathe art. Imagine an ice sculpture emitting glacial music—in the desert. Imagine the Man, greeting you, neon and benevolence, watching over the community. You're here to build a community that needs you and relies on you.<sup>1</sup>

In a society that has been fractured by economic rationalism, globalization, racial disunity, ideological differences, fear, and violence, the Burning Man community claims to offer solace, welcome, and acceptance.

*Survival:* Burning Man is not for the fainthearted. It involves venturing into the desert and surviving without restaurants, air conditioning, or shopping malls. Why is this important? With all the comforts of home stripped away, participants have no choice but to look deep within themselves, to discover who they truly are, and to summon up from within themselves the will and the power to survive—both in the desert and after they return to the world outside.

*Empowerment:* Again, to the web site:

You're here to create. Since nobody at Burning Man is a spectator, you're here to build your own new world. You've built an egg for shelter, a suit made of light sticks, a car that looks like a shark's fin. You've covered yourself in silver, you're wearing a straw hat and a string of pearls, or maybe a skirt for the first time.

Some artists create massive, highly sophisticated art installations. Others develop smaller works. Some people simply paint their naked bodies or their cars. Others, who have come expecting merely to spectate, are cajoled into expressing themselves creatively throughout the week. No one is deemed to be without talent.

*Sensuality:* Burning Man is a highly sensual, experiential community.

You're here to experience. Ride your bike in the expanse of nothingness with your eyes closed. Meet the theme camp—enjoy Irrational Geographic, relax at Bianca's Smut

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<sup>1</sup>This and all subsequent quotations about Burning Man are from Molly Steenson, "What Is Burning Man?" [http://burningman.com/whatisburningman/about\\_burningman/experience.htm](http://burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/experience.htm).

Shack and eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Find your love and understand each other as you walk slowly under a parasol. Wander under the veils of dust at night on the playa.

*Celebration:* The crescendo of the festival is the burning of the large human effigy in the middle of the camp. Participants have told us that as the Burning Man goes up in flames, they experience a deeply spiritual sensation. As the founder of Burning Man, Larry Harvey says,

As the procession starts, the circle forms, and the man ignites, you experience something personal, something new to yourself, something you've never felt before. It's an epiphany, it's primal, it's newborn. And it's completely individual.

Artists cast their art works into the flames. There is apparently a purging, a form of atonement and a sense of liberation and joy.

*Liminality:* The word *liminal* from the Latin *limen* (threshold) signifies an in-between time. Often used by anthropologists to describe the period between childhood and adulthood, it refers to the transitional, temporary period of human transformation. The Burning Man community appears in August and takes over the seemingly untouched playa, then leaves in September leaving no trace it was ever there. First-timers are instructed,

You'll leave as you came. When you depart from Burning Man, you leave no trace. Everything you built, you dismantle. The waste you make and the objects you consume leave with you. Volunteers will stay for weeks to return the Black Rock Desert to its pristine condition. But you'll take the world you built with you. When you drive back down the dusty roads toward home, you slowly reintegrate to the world you came from. You feel in tune with the other dust-covered vehicles that shared the same community. Over time, vivid images still dance in your brain, floating back to you when the weather changes. The Burning Man community, whether your friends, your new acquaintances, or the Burning Man project, embraces you. At the end, though your journeys to and from Burning Man are finished, you embark on a different journey—forever.

We open this book with our impressions of the Burning Man phenomenon because it and festivals like it around the world seem to be saying something important to the world in general and to the church specifically. Burning Man is not just a bad day in Black Rock (to quote a great movie title). It's a cry from an emerging postmodern generation for a community of belonging, spirituality, sensuality, empowerment, and liberation. And yet, once you've been to the Nevada desert and tasted something as overwhelming as Burning Man, what does the contemporary traditional church have to offer you? We, the authors, take the view that the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is greater than anything offered at Black Rock. But we are realistic enough to admit that unless the church recovers its role as a subversive, missionary movement, no one who has been to Burning Man will be the least bit interested in it. We are both missionaries to the core. And like all

missionaries we cannot stand by and watch the contemporary church become a pale, anemic version of its former self. What is required to reach the Burning Man generation is nothing less than a complete paradigm shift for the Western church.

The same people who first told us about Burning Man also spoke with gusto about their favorite film, *Fight Club*, starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton. In that film a subversive community of young men begin to gather around the charismatic figure Tyler Durden (played by both Pitt and Norton—if you haven't seen the film, don't ask). Under his manic leadership the club members meet to fight each other and to inflict random acts of seditious violence on society. Theirs is a community of male empowerment with a strongly anticonsumerist sentiment. Like the Burning Man festival, it is also about belonging, liberation, rebellion, and the rejection of middle-class American values. There is an untamed energy about Durden's fight club. It has a dissident wildness about it, and we know many young men who have been deeply affected by the film.

It might seem unsavory to many Christian people to be asked to learn something about the need for an emerging missional church by exploring Burning Man or *Fight Club*. But we are convinced that both are prime examples of the desperate yearning that has been unleashed in the Western world over the past ten or so years. During that time, the advent of postmodernism has raised within the West many expectations for an experiential, activist form of religious, mystical experience. The Christian church has not met these expectations, though it could be argued that for a brief time some forms of Pentecostalism came closer than the rest of the church. The contemporary traditional church is increasingly seen as the least likely option for those seeking an artistic, politically subversive, activist community of mystical faith. The church can no longer write the emerging Burning Man generation off as a small subculture. While the activities at Burning Man might not be everybody's cup of tea, the yearnings it seeks to meet are much more common than the church gives credence to. D. H. Lawrence said as long ago as 1924, "The adventure has gone out of the Christian venture." He then proposed that humankind create a new venture toward hope. His aspirations are still being played out to this day.

## **Evolution or Revolution?**

We've become increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it's in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally reforming its structures. What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach. Therefore, it is our intention to tell stories about the local heroes we've encountered on our travels around the world. Because we do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach to church planting and church growth, the various models we'll discuss are presented not as a panacea, not as *the* recommended way forward for the church, but as examples of what certain missionaries have done in their quests to reach Melbourne,

San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Glasgow, and many other cities in the Western context with the gospel. We will present a number of principles and suggestions for church leaders wanting to morph into what is now openly being called the missional church. The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) says, “The missional church represents God in the encounter between God and human culture. It exists not because of human goals or desires, but as a result of God’s creating and saving work in the world. It is a visible manifestation of how the Good News of Jesus Christ is present in human life and transforms human culture to reflect more faithfully God’s intentions for creation. It is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God’s activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

In case this sounds like the mandate for just about every church (whether consciously “missional” or not), GOCN furthers its definition by stating that a missional church “seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.” In other words, such a church makes its mission its priority and perpetually asks itself, “*What has God called us to be and do in our current cultural context?*” The issue of cultural context is essential because the missional church shapes itself to fit that context in order to transform it for the sake of the kingdom of God. By definition, the missional church is always outward looking, always changing (as culture continues to change), and always faithful to the Word of God. In many places it is so radical it barely resembles church as we know it. In other cases it might appear conventional but is in fact incarnating itself into its community in surprising and exciting ways. Above all, we’re convinced that what will ultimately be required is Christian leadership that values imagination, creativity, innovation, and daring.

Albert Einstein, one of history’s greatest thinkers, once noted that “the kind of thinking that will solve the world’s problems will be of a different order to the kind of thinking that created those problems in the first place.” This was no mere wordplay for Einstein. It was the defining motif in his life as a paradigm shifter. His ability to think with radical originality precipitated no less than two, and some argue three, major paradigm shifts in our understanding of physics and of the cosmos, and in so doing changed the course of history and shaped the thinking of generations. We are proposing that a similar paradigm-busting imagination is needed for the emergence of the missional church of the twenty-first century in the West.

If Einstein was right, then the problems of the church, like all real problems in any context, cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created those problems in the first instance. In other words, boxlike thinking simply cannot solve the problems of the box. We are in dire need of some Einsteinian originality if we are going to engage the issues of the twenty-first century with any real missional effectiveness. It’s time to step out of the box of Christendom in order to take on the problems raised by Christendom.

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<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.gocn.org/>.

## Christendom—Get Over It!

Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth. Its sources go back to the time when Constantine came to the throne of the Roman Empire and granted Christians complete freedom of worship and even favored Christianity, thereby undermining all other religions in the empire.<sup>3</sup> In virtually an instant, Christianity moved from being a marginalized, subversive, and persecuted movement secretly gathering in houses and catacombs to being the favored religion in the empire. Everything changed! The emperor had changed from being the principal persecutor of Christianity to being the chief sponsor of the church. With the Edict of Milan, the age of the missional-apostolic church had come to an end. Things were to be very different from then on.

In the fifth to tenth centuries Christianity grew from infancy to adulthood throughout Western Europe, emerging in the eleventh century as fully grown and in control of the culture. By the Middle Ages, the church-state symbiosis was formalized into an institutional interdependence between the pope and the ruler of what was then called the Holy Roman Empire, effectively Western Europe today. This institutional partnership between church and state changed forever the social behaviors and religious patterning of Europe. In the *corpus Christianum* (viz. Christendom), church and state became the pillars of the sacral culture, each supporting the other. Even where there existed conflicts between church and state, it was always a conflict *within* the overarching configuration of Christendom itself. Christendom had by this stage developed its own distinct identity, one that provided the matrix for the understanding of both church and state. It had effectively become *the* metanarrative for an entire epoch. A metanarrative is an overarching story that claims to contain truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures. And while the Christendom story no longer defines Western culture, it still remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in almost every Western nation, including and perhaps especially the United States.

That metanarrative not only defined church and state, it defined all the individuals and social structures in its orbit of influence. Members of that society were assumed to be Christian by birth rather than by choice. Christianity was an official part of the established culture of Europe. In some countries, the king or queen actually became the head of the church. Overall, Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood, and sacraments.

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<sup>3</sup>See the excellent article by Stuart Murray, *Church Growth Digest* 22/1 (Autumn 2000): 3–4. When we proclaim Christendom dead, we use that term—Christendom—advisedly. We don't proclaim Christianity dead, nor the church. Jesus promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. But Christendom, that period of Western history during which the church held sway as the moral and spiritual centerpiece of civilization, has vanished.

Taken as a sociopolitical reality, Christendom has been in decline for the last 250 years, so much so that contemporary Western culture has been called by many historians (secular and Christian) as the *post-Christendom* culture. Society, at least in its overtly non-Christian manifestation, is “over” Christendom. But this is not the case within the Western church itself. Christendom, as a paradigm of understanding, as a metanarrative, still exercises an overweening influence on our existing theological, missiological, and ecclesiological understandings in church circles. In other words, we still think of the church and its mission in terms of Christendom. While in reality we are in a post-Christendom context, the Western church still operates for the most part in a Christendom mode. Constantine, it seems, is still the emperor of our imaginations.

<b>Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Mode (A.D. 32 to 313)</b>	<b>Advance and Triumph of Christendom Mode (313 to current)</b>	<b>(Emerging) Missional Mode (past 10 years)</b>
Didn't have dedicated sacral buildings. Often underground and persecuted.	Buildings become central to the notion, and experience, of church.	Rejects the concern and need for dedicated “church” buildings.
Leadership operating with a fivefold ministry-leadership ethos.	Leadership by an institutionally ordained clergy operating primarily in a pastor-teacher mode.	Leadership embraces a pioneering-innovative mode including a fivefold ministry-leadership ethos. Non-institutional by preference.
Grassroots, decentralized movement.	Institutional-hierarchical notion of leadership and structure.	Grassroots, decentralized movements.
Communion celebrated as a sacralized community meal.	Increasing institutionalization of grace through the sacraments.	Redeems, re-sacralizes, and ritualizes new symbols and events, including the meal.
Church is on the margins of society and underground.	Church is perceived as central to society and surrounding culture.	Church is once again on the fringes of society and culture. The church reembraces a missional stance in relation to culture.
Missionary, incarnational-sending church.	Attractional / “extractional.”	Missional, incarnational-sending church.

## A Tale of Two Pubs

To understand the difference between Christendom-like thinking and the emerging missional model, the following examples might help. Recently it was reported that a congregation in a small rural town in Australia had taken an innovative step toward reaching its community. A Melbourne newspaper announced, “Patrons of the Hamilton Hotel will soon be offered spirit of a different kind. In an unusual conversion, the town’s Baptist congregation—who are teetotalers—have taken over one of the six pubs.”<sup>4</sup> The Hamilton community watched in amazement as the pub,

<sup>4</sup> *Sunday Herald Sun*, Melbourne, Australia, 15 October 2000, 3.

located on the main street opposite the local post office, was bought by the Baptists and renovated into a church and conference center. Its front bar was turned into a recreation area for young people and its dance area was rebuilt into a chapel and meeting room. The bar was transformed into a coffee bar, the old pub now becoming an alcohol-free building.

In the article, various church leaders from Melbourne and the pastor of the Hamilton Baptist Church spoke of the relocation as innovative, creative, and daring. However, one sour note was sounded. Midway through the newspaper article a local from Hamilton is quoted. "One of the hotel's former regulars, farmer Bruce McKellar, 71, said he would miss his corner of the bar. 'I would walk in and straight to it; we all had our own space,' he said." The implied sadness of this comment wasn't lost on us. Farmer McKellar had been displaced from his personal seat at the bar, and though he had probably moved on to one of the other pubs, he would never again be welcomed at his favorite watering hole. In Australia, like England, the local pub is a place of acceptance and friendship. Patrons develop allegiances to their pubs and though they might visit another one occasionally, they feel a deep connection to *their local* (as it's called). Though American bars can be less friendly, more foreboding places, the myth perpetuated in the successful television show *Cheers*, about a place "where everybody knows your name," is true of most English and Australian pubs. In Hamilton, farmers, tradesmen, and business people had been shooed out of the Hamilton Hotel to make way for the Baptists.

This project, though appearing innovative, in fact reflects Christendom thinking. It assumes that the church belongs prominently on the main street, and it claims that the church has the right to take over a public space and clean out the local people while creating a so-called sanctified religious zone. Whether it's in a pub, a school auditorium, or a two-hundred-year-old cathedral, it represents the same thinking. As we will seek to demonstrate, what is needed is the abandonment of the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world and the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption.

On the other side of the planet, in the English town of Bradford, another pub has been transformed by Christians. The Cock & Bottle is a yellow, two-story English pub at the bottom of the street on the corner of Bradford's inner ring road. Two years ago it was rented by the Bradford Christian Pub Consortium. Bradford is a hardscrabble, working-class town. It has been noted in recent times for its racial conflict and street violence. But the Cock & Bottle represents a place of sanctuary and solace. Malcolm Willis has been employed by the consortium to manage the pub, and he and his wife live upstairs above the bar. He proves himself to be a genuinely missional leader when he says, "Jesus said go into all the world. And this includes pubs. He didn't say sit in your church and wait for people to come to you."<sup>5</sup> The Willises and their staff (all Christians) have set about creating a loving, welcoming

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Chapman, "Last Orders," *Interact*, SMG (July–September 2001): 14.

environment, where locals are cared for, listened to, and ministered to. Says Willis, “Initially, many won’t accept you talking about Jesus. Maybe after you’ve listened to them ten or twenty times—which can be exhausting—they might say ‘Can you pray for me?’ And then you see things happen.”<sup>6</sup> The missional church always thinks of the long haul rather than the quick fix.

Of course, the dilemma about whether Christians should be serving alcohol or not is bound to arise. Willis is himself a teetotaler, but he has an earthy and realistic outlook on the issue of drinking, “Yes, we’re selling booze to people who could do without it, but if we don’t, they’ll just go somewhere else—at least if they’re here, we can get alongside them. I knew that when I came here I personally had to be seen not to drink, but I’m not everybody. Someone once showed me Proverbs 31, which says, ‘Beer and wine are only for the dying or for those who have lost all hope. Let them drink and forget how poor and miserable they feel. But you must defend those who are helpless and have no hope.’ So I have to ask, What would Jesus have done? I think the Lord would have been here in the pubs.”<sup>7</sup>

There is a world of difference (and not just geographically) between the Cock & Bottle and the Hamilton Hotel. The former is missional, incarnational, and very risky. The latter is safe. It demonstrates sound financial management (it was cheaper for the Baptist Church to renovate the pub than to build a brand-new building). But it is classic Christendom thinking.

GOCN, to whom we referred earlier, has fostered much research into cultural trends and the revisioning of a new (missional) approach to church. They have come up with twelve hallmarks of a missional church:

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in this church’s life.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
5. The church seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 17.

9. The church practices hospitality.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

We can't fault any of these features, but we would like to propose three more, overarching principles that give energy and direction to the above-mentioned marks. In fact, we will use these three features as the headings for three of the broad sections of this book. These three principles are:

1. The missional church is *incarnational*, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him.
2. The missional church is *messianic*, not dualistic, in its spirituality. That is, it adopts the worldview of Jesus the Messiah, rather than that of the Greco-Roman empire. Instead of seeing the world as divided between the sacred (religious) and profane (nonreligious), like Christ it sees the world and God's place in it as more holistic and integrated.
3. The missional church adopts an *apostolic*, rather than a hierarchical, mode of leadership. By apostolic we mean a mode of leadership that recognizes the fivefold model detailed by Paul in Ephesians 6. It abandons the triangular hierarchies of the traditional church and embraces a biblical, flat-leadership community that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, and prophecy, as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts.

We believe the missional genius of the church can only be unleashed when there are foundational changes made to the church's very DNA, and this means addressing core issues like ecclesiology, spirituality, and leadership. It means a complete shift away from Christendom thinking, which is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical.

Many Christians seem to have great difficulty giving up on the old Christendom-based assumptions. They fear that to finally abandon Christendom means we cast the church into oblivion or chaos. They would ask, How could a bunch of Christians running a pub in Bradford be a church? Well, we think they can be. Many of the ways the missional church is emerging around the world look messy, chaotic, and dynamic. They don't always meet in the same room on a Sunday for church services, but they are worshipping God, building Christian community, and serving their world. They meet the biblical criteria for a church, but they don't often

look like church as we are used to thinking of it. A helpful way of looking at the post-Christendom church is to see not disorder but a diaspora. This is the view of theologian Douglas John Hall who prefers to think of the contemporary church as a diaspora rather than as an institution. He sees this as a more positive reformulation than the resignation or defeatism of seeing Christendom's end as chaotic. He says:

If we once have the courage to give up our defense of the old facades which have nothing or very little behind them; if we cease to maintain, in public, the pretense of a universal Christendom; if we stop straining every nerve to get *everybody* baptized, to get *everybody* married in church and onto our registers (even when success means only, at bottom, a victory for tradition, custom and ancestry, not for true faith and interior conviction); if, by letting go, we visibly relieve Christianity of the burdensome impression that it accepts responsibility for everything that goes on under this Christian top-dressing, the impression that Christianity is a sort of Everyman's Religious Varnish, a folk-religion (at the same level as that of folk-costumes)—*then* we can be free for real missionary adventure and apostolic self-confidence. . . .<sup>8</sup>

We couldn't agree more. What are the effects that Christendom has had on our understanding of the church and its mission, and why is it so important to "get over it"?<sup>9</sup> Christendom in its essence is a stance in relation to its context, a mode of operation, a way of conceiving itself. Its view of mission is fundamentally distorted. What's more, it has a very fixed notion of the church in its concrete expression—it is normally associated with (distinctly designed) buildings and a clergy. Its missional mode is primarily attractional rather than sending or incarnational. It assumes a certain centrality in a culture, and its placement of buildings (usually the tallest building in the medieval setting) symbolizes that centrality. Its type of leadership can generally be described as priestly, sometimes prophetic to insiders but almost never to outsiders (no one "out there" is listening), and rarely apostolic. Christendom has moved Christianity into a maintenance mode.

Christendom, when viewed from a missiological perspective, is more than the symbiotic relationship between church and state that resulted in a move away from the normative apostolic-missionary mode of the New Testament. When Christianity was recognized and accepted in 313 and then gained favored status with the imperial courts, it altered the fundamental *mode* of the church's self-understanding and its conception of its unique task in the world. Because a type of "contract" now existed between the church and the political powers, the church's understanding of itself in relation to that state, culture, and society was profoundly changed. We don't mean to discount the incredible mission movements that occurred sporadically in the fifth to the tenth centuries. But it is fair to say that by the triumph of Christendom in the eleventh century, mission was no longer seen as necessary within Europe. It was

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<sup>8</sup>Douglas John Hall, "Metamorphosis: From Christendom to Diaspora," in Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 67.

<sup>9</sup>The effects of Christendom on our theological perspective in general are outside of the focus of this book. In this discussion, we will focus primarily (and briefly) on the effects on our notion of the church and of our understanding of its mission.

delimited to identifiable non-Christian religions both inside and outside of the realm, but no longer to those baptized by the official church. Theology was now used as a powerful political tool. So too were missions. Mission was used as a means of colonization and advancement of various state interests. Christendom set up a certain correlation, a complex of assumptions, about the association between the realms of politics, geography, church, spirituality, and mission. As a result the gospel was politicized, regionalized, as well as *racial-ized*. There was no longer any real place for the subversive activity associated with the New Testament gospel. The “revolution” was quelled from the inside. The historical institution of the church from then on would brook little prophetic criticism of the political realm that threatened the church’s elite status in the empire and vice versa.

## The Bankruptcy of Christendom

The fact that the Christendom paradigm has presided over the last seventeen centuries in the West provides us with a substantial basis with which to test its success or failure. As we stand here at the dawn of a new millennium, we believe that we must, at long last, give up trying to rejig the paradigm to suit the massively changed missional contexts of the Western church. *It simply has not worked.* In fact it has created more problems. The church is in decline in almost every context in the First World. The church is worse off precisely because of Christendom’s failure to evangelize its own context and establish gospel communities that transform the culture. The missional church, with all its fluidity and lack of buildings, its failure to institutionalize, has been far more successful from the margins. For those holding on to the Christendom mode, it is as if they were trying to interpret the cosmos with a pre-Copernican view of the world. The paradigm doesn’t fit. The emperor has been shown to have no clothes.

It’s now a matter of record that one of the reasons for the loss of influence exercised by the church in the West has been its flirtation with modernity and the ideas of the Enlightenment. Says John Drane, “No persecutor or foe in two thousand years has wreaked such havoc on the church as has modernity.”<sup>10</sup> By the end of the era of modernity in the mid-twentieth century, the Christian faith was no longer the center of Western culture. It had been swept away by the very movement it had sought to befriend. Where once the church in Europe occupied a place of significant influence, by the end of the twentieth century it was almost completely irrelevant. In Europe, the United Kingdom, and its colonial outposts, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the church had been displaced from its central position.

Martin Robinson cites the Swedish church as an example.<sup>11</sup> He notes that even though a law that prohibited Swedish citizens leaving the Church of Sweden

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<sup>10</sup>John Drane, *Evangelism for a New Age: Creating Churches for the Next Century* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994).

<sup>11</sup>Martin Robinson, *The Faith of the Unbeliever* (London: Monarch, 1997), 13.

was lifted in 1860, very few actually do. In fact, a huge ninety-five percent of the population are members of the national church. However, a recent study found that only eight percent of all Swedes adhere to a Christian worldview. When you consider that that figure would undoubtedly comprise a good number of the five percent who have opted to join another church, there are very few official members of the Church of Sweden who hold to its tenets. The national church exists in name only. It is an artifice. The same can be said of other Western European nations.

We must admit that Christendom, particularly its ecclesiological and its missiological manifestations, amounts to something of a failed experiment. To reiterate, by the term Christendom, we are referring to a period in history when the church assumed influence by its connection to temporal, secular power. Its high watermark occurred in the Middle Ages and continued beyond the Reformation well into the 1700s. Since the emergence of the Enlightenment it has been in decline, disappearing in the latter part of the twentieth century. It is time to move on and find a new mode of understanding and engagement with surrounding contexts. We can no longer afford our historical sentimentality, even addiction, to the past. Christendom is *not* the biblical mode of the church. It was/is merely one way in which the church has conceived of itself. In enshrining it as the sole form of the church, we have made it into an idol that has captivated our imaginations and enslaved us to a historical-cultural expression of the church. We have not answered the challenges of our time precisely because we refuse to let go of the idol. This must change! The answer to the problem of mission in the West requires something far more radical than reworking a dated and untenable model. It will require that we adopt something that looks far more like the early church in terms of its conception of the church (ecclesiology) and its core task in the world (missiology).

## The Rise of the Missional Church

When there are megashifts in a culture, there tends to be a reconceptualization of the church. The more profound the cultural shift, the more thorough is the shift in the church's notion of itself. The most noteworthy example of this was the innate connection between the Renaissance of the fifteenth century and the Reformation of the early sixteenth century. The Renaissance, particularly with its new hermeneutic, set in motion cultural forces that led inexorably to Luther's revolution, which in turn unleashed a massive recalibration in both church theology and praxis. The church is inseparably related to its cultural milieu. This provides a vital lesson for our day. We are living in an epoch-shifting period in the West (and globally) as we shift from the modern to the postmodern. There is every indication that this cultural shift will be even more profound and radical than was the shift precipitated by the Renaissance, which took place within the auspices of Christendom. What is happening now is entirely outside of any discernible Christian influence.

We propose that what will emerge from the chaos of the current social-historical shift to the postmodern is likely to be a second reformation as the church rediscovers

itself as an apostolic movement. In fact, we suggest that if the church in the West does not embrace such a radical recalibration, it will find itself increasingly imperiled. The standard Christendom model will simply not engage the Burning Man generation. To reach them and all other postmodern subcultures, the church should abandon its role as a static institution and embrace its initial calling to be a missionary movement. What is the nature of this apostolic movement? Whereas Christendom has unraveled because of its seduction by Western culture, the emerging missional church must see itself as being able to interact meaningfully with culture without ever being beguiled by it. This is the classic task of the cross-cultural missionary: to engage culture without compromising the gospel. We cannot emphasize this enough. In fact, the whole tenor of this book will be to call post-Christendom to see itself again as a *missionary movement* rather than as an institution.

Essentially the early church was a missional movement to its core. It understood that personal conversion implied the embracing of the *missio dei*—the redemptive mission of God to the whole world through the work of his Messiah. It is in this sense that we use the word *apostolic*, and it is this redemptive mission that we seek to recover for our own day. Forging apostolic movements will require massive paradigm shifts in the Christendom-based church. It requires a different kind of thinking that innovates new modes of doing and being church and recasts its notions of leadership, structure, and mission.

The church by its very nature has an indissoluble relationship to the surrounding cultural context. This relationship defines the practical nature of its mission. But the reason for mission comes from somewhere else. To say it more theologically, Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology. It is absolutely vital that the church gets the order right. We will deal with the Christological issue in a later chapter and then present the practical implications in another chapter. It is Christ who determines our purpose and mission in the world (discipleship), and then it is our mission that must drive our search for modes of being-in-the-world.

We began with the question “Evolution or Revolution?” The answer is *revolution*. For the early church it was always revolution, but revolution is especially necessary now. As we will point out in the next chapter, we feel that we are living in an incredibly urgent time that can be described as the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of Western culture, and the message of the church is not even getting any airplay. We cannot expect to impact Western culture by simply renovating disused pubs. A completely alternate model is required. If we fail at this point, history will judge us very harshly. It is likely, in our home of Australia at least, that it will spell the church’s demise as a significant spiritual force in our land, and the church will be consigned to being a footnote to history. The statistics bear this out right across the West. This is not a time for evolution, as if another desperate reworking of the old model is going to fix our problems and start a revival. It is time for a revolution in the way we do and are church.