ABSTRACT

The emergence of a 'postmodern' culture since 1945 has placed the proclamation of the church in a new context. Central to this study are three assumptions. First, that effective proclamation must be revisioned as an expression of a theology of the cross. Second, that this will involve the gospel being encountered as an enriching experience of community within the fringe activities of the local church. Thirdly, that against the background of fragmented and incoherent notions of selfhood, associated with the postmodern condition, proclamation must enable the self to be revisioned as a gift from God, rather than as a human construct.

In chapter one, numerical decline in the churches is set against the background of what the Anglican church of 1945 considered to be an intensification of the secularization of society, but which by the 1960s and 1970s could be described as a postmodern culture. The call for a dialogue between the gospel and our culture sets the scene for discussing three major proclamation initiatives, which, from 1945 to the 1980s, are considered to have failed to achieve their aims because they gave insufficient attention to this newly emerging cultural context.

In chapter two, a more adequate model of proclamation is sought. Its essential characteristics must include the ability to operate in the postmodern marketplace of religious pluralism, and be capable of minimizing a culture of suspicion, which leading postmodern thinkers have associated with both religion, and all high profile marketing messages addressed to the community at large. Proclamation informed by a theology of the cross is considered to be an adequate response to this situation.

Chapter three takes up the major theme of community as an experience of good news, in which people are legitimated and valued. We note that the writers of all four gospels portray Jesus as the founder of a community, which validated a wide cross section of people who were subsequently called to live under the rule of God. The local church which understands itself as an extension of the community of Jesus, is able to engage in this same ministry, drawing people into a faith commitment to Christ.

In chapter four, notions of the self associated with the postmodern condition are discussed as fragmented and incoherent. Against this background, proclamation is discussed as a means of enabling a revisioning of selfhood as a narrative self, with a renewed sense of personal agency and a capacity for self transcendence.

Finally in chapter five, within the context of a church planting exercise in Tilbury, Essex, a renewal of numerical growth is experienced through Christian proclamation revisioned as a theology of the cross. Within caring and supportive ministries it becomes possible to create a rich experience of community, and a revisioning of selfhood. Under these conditions the church can effectively proclaim the gospel and anticipate the making of new disciples.

PART I

PROCLAMATION IN THE CULTURE OF POSTMODERNITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the trustees of the Dr. Williams' Scholarship bursary which allowed me to take time out of pastoral ministry in order to pursue further study.

My tutors, Rev. Dr. David Jasper and Rev. Dr. William Storrar, have been very supportive and I am glad to acknowledge their support, criticism, and encouragement.

The Mission Department of the Baptist Union of Great Britain were very helpful in providing access to their archives in Didcot, Oxfordshire. I am grateful for their help and cooperation.

My thanks are also due to the staff of the Church of England archives service in Southwark, London, who allowed me to use their facilities. I am grateful for the practical advice and efficient services which they provided.

I am pleased to acknowledge my gratitude to my wife Sheila for being willing to be uprooted for a year whilst I pursued my studies. Her endless patience and support have been much appreciated, and her proof reading and practical suggestions have been a great asset.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

PROCLAMATION WITHIN A CHANGING CULTURE

1.1 CULTURAL SHIFT

From the perspective of the 1990s it has become clear that the church's proclamation of the gospel has become less effective since the end of World War II. This is clearly demonstrated by the numerical decline of church membership over the last 50 years.[1] This thesis maintains that since 1945 a discernible shift has taken place within English culture and that in order to proclaim the gospel more effectively the church must grasp the significance of this new cultural context, which we can describe as a movement from modernity to postmodernity. I will argue that proclamation of the gospel in a postmodern society can lead to the making of new disciples and new church growth. I will show that a reformation of evangelistic initiatives, based upon a theology of the cross, empowers two fruitful approaches to evangelization which can be developed at local church level. First, the message of the church can be developed within an enriching experience of community life. Such an experience creates the conditions under which the heart and mind can turn to Christ. Secondly, within an enriching experience of community, and against the background of the fragmented selfhood associated with the postmodern condition, the gospel story relocates the self as a narrative self, which is by nature open to the world, and capable of responding to the witness of a living religion.

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[1] 'Total Christian Membership in Great Britain', in *A Century of British Christianity: Historic Statistics 1900-1985 with Projections to 2000 A.D*, Monograph 14. (London: Marc Europe[1990 (?)]), p. 26. This table indicates a loss of Protestant membership - from 6,377,000 in 1945 to an estimated 2,944,000 in 2000 A.D.

1.1.1 SECULARIZATION AND DECLINE

The decline in church membership from 1945 motivated the Church of England to produce the report *Towards the Conversion of England* (T. C. E.) which attributed what it described as the 'drift from religion'[2] to new expressions of humanism[3] and secular education.[4] It seems that the church attributed numerical decline and the erosion of Christian morality to new post-war expressions of secularization. By secularization I mean that process in which religious consciousness, activities, and institutions, lose social significance, and that the essential functions for the operation of the social system become rationalized, passing out of the control of agencies devoted to the supernatural. The final report of T. C. E. calls for a new nationwide proclamation of the gospel within the context of a 'disintegrated society' which they understand as being deeply secularized[5].

The 1960s seemed to confirm the idea that the secularization of society worked against traditional religious beliefs. It was becoming apparent that society no longer depended upon the church to provide it with an understanding of the world or the human condition. David Bosch commenting on the secular society refers to D. L. Munby, who, in his *The Idea of a Secular Society* (1963), considered that Western Christianity had helped to bring about a society in which it was no longer necessary to hold to any particular view. Again, he draws on Arend van Leeuwen in his *Christianity and World History* (1964), who claimed that secularization was inspired by the gospel, and was the wave of the future.[6] The religious establishment was rocked in 1963 when the Anglican Bishop John Robinson published his *Honest to God*. In its final chapter entitled *Recasting the Mould*, Robinson argued that Christianity as traditionally practiced and taught was unintelligible to modern people, and might be abandoned altogether unless it was radically reinterpreted for a secularized society.

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[2] *Towards the Conversion of England* (London: Church Assembly, 1945), p. 2.
[3] Ibid. pp. 6-10.
[4] Ibid. pp. 10-13.
[5] Ibid. p. xi.
[6] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, (New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 270.

The confidence required for such an undertaking was also reflected at an economic level: economic growth was rising fast and was expected to continue. A bright new future seemed to be dawning as older traditional pre-war values faded. After the carnage of war and the austerity conditions of post-war Britain, the 1960s seemed to hail an evolutionary step towards a new empowered selfhood, which took the secularization of society, and the decline of religion for granted. From the mid 1960s journalists and social commentators could reasonably speak of a post-Christian era. It is at least understandable that from 1945 to the mid 1960s the Anglican church should consider the so-called secularization of society to be a major impediment to the proclamation of the gospel.

1.1.2 SECULARIZATION AND BELIEF

In spite of the so-called secularization of society it has become clear from the perspective of the 1990s that numerical decline is not explained by a corresponding loss of religious belief, which remains widespread in Western society. The sociologist Grace Davie refers to 'the persistence of religious belief in contemporary Britain along-side the marked decline - though not the disappearance - of religious practice'.[7] Davie points to the 1970s as a less confident decade in which the economic bubble burst, and, 'the pendulum began to swing once again towards a greater emphasis on the distinctiveness of the sacred'.[8] This was to become a decade in which new and traditional expressions of religion were to experience renewed numerical growth.

First, the 1970s witnessed thousands of people abandoning the denominational churches to re-form as house churches. Davie detects a new distinctiveness and diversity within these emerging groups, which on the one hand rejected the assumptions of the secular society, but also distanced themselves from what she describes as the 'inclusiveness of mainline religion'.[9] Second, this drift from denominational thought and practice did not end with the so-called New Churches,

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[7] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 8.
[8] Ibid. p. 36.
[9] Ibid. p. 37.

which were themselves recasting the mould by redefining themselves against the confessional churches, and carrying away large segments of their congregations. The 1970s witnessed the further recasting of the mould in the formation of a plethora of non-theistic New Age configurations. The spirit of secularization seemed to be opening doorways of perception to a new non-theistic religious entrepreneurialism.

A third area of numerical growth, which can be traced from the 1970s, is also taking place amongst some of the older denominational churches. The traditional Pentecostal denominations are together experiencing steady growth.[10] Their emphasis upon faith as a feeling response, and the expectation of members to participate in the ministry of the church according to gifting and disposition, is now proving to be attractive across the class divide. The Orthodox churches are also growing for quite different reasons.[11] The emphasis on mystery, wonder, and enchantment are again in vogue, and the Orthodox liturgy understood as a participation in the liturgy of heaven, vividly portrayed to all the senses, has a compelling quality for an increasing number of seekers. Clearly a spiritual hunger still exists which can be satisfied by an orthodox Christian faith, although it seems that what we might describe as growth areas within religion, appeal primarily to feelings rather than intellect.

The secularization of society has not amounted to the elimination of the religious quest for meaning, which in orthodox and unorthodox forms are very much alive in Western society. It seems that the persistence of religious consciousness is part of a wider cultural shift, in which, 'the religious and sacred would appear to have undergone displacement, migration, and transformation.'[12] The post war years have witnessed a cultural shift in which perceptions of the world, religion, and the self have changed significantly. It is within this new context, implied by the term postmodernity, that Christian proclamation must now function. The church must now

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[10] *U.K. Christian Handbook 1994/95*, ed. by Peter Brierley & Val Hiscock, 1994/95 edn, (London: Christian Research Association, 1993), p. 246 (table 13a).

[11] Ibid. p. 246 (table 13a).

[12] Richard H. Roberts, 'A Postmodern Church? Some Preliminary Reflections on Ecclesiology and Social Theory', in *Essentials of Christian Community*, ed. by David F. Ford & Dennis L. Stamps (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark , 1996,) p. 184.

understand its proclamation of the gospel to be a dialogical engagement within new cultural formations, not all of which are characterized by secular*ism* and unbelief.

1.2 CHRISTIAN PROCLAMATION

1.2.1 WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PROCLAMATION ?

Christian proclamation is that activity of the church, which strives to pass on its faith to all unevangelized peoples. It embodies a story of salvation, which reveals that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, who wills that all humanity should come under the rule of God, which has been established on earth by his birth, life, death, and resurrection. Whilst the church anticipates that its proclamation will engage the mind and attention of the hearer, it is not understood as a purely human activity, but something in which God himself is involved. Jesus's assertion that the Holy Spirit would be active in the verbal witness of his disciples, Mt. 10:17-20, enables them to speak with the confidence of those who believe that they are being actively empowered. When the church proclaims Christ it understands itself to be introducing a new creative possibility for humanity. It is an activity which anticipates that the rule of God will be consummated at the end of history, in a way which is presently beyond the church's understanding, in which humankind will be brought into a state of salvation and well-being. The church therefore erects signs which point to the eschatological horizon, it sends messages, issues invitations, and enters into dialogue with numerous people groups. Words are sought which faithfully embody the redemptive activity of God, and which can, however inadequately, embody the message of hope which the church is commissioned to share.

1.2.2 WHY DO WE PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL?

The church understands itself to be a missionary community. Part of its essential self identity is that it holds a commission from the risen Christ to proclaim the gospel far and wide - to the whole world. This commission is attested by all four gospel writers,

Mt. 28:18-20, Mk. 16:9-20, Lk. 24:47-49, and Jn. 20:21. The sharing and telling ministries which overflow from the worship of God, and the celebration of his rule, are directed toward all who are open to inquiry, in the hope that many will come to participate in the church's hope. Part of the church's self identity is that it is charged to pass on a message from the risen Christ; it is a movement with a message to proclaim or it is nothing.

1.2.3 HOW IS PROCLAMATION EXPERIENCED ?

Christian proclamation is presented as an address from God through his messengers. It may be experienced as a report or announcement, which may be cast as a discussion, a homily, a written account, or a dramatic presentation; but primarily it is a verbal event which is heard, evaluated, and acted upon; and which has the potential to effect a moral and spiritual transformation upon the hearer. This verbal proclamation which attempts accurately to report the hope of the church is understood to be more than mere opinion or advice; it is reported as an authoritative word from God. In the New Testament the two Greek verbs *angello* and *kerysso* are the principle words used to convey an act of proclamation. *angello* gives the sense of a report or announcement, and indicates the sense of imparting information or encouragement. *kerysso* also carries the same sense of a verbal report, but has the character of a public and authoritative announcement which demands compliance.

1.2.3.1 *Angello*

In the New Testament the verb *angello* and its compounds are experienced as words which inform, call for repentance and conversion, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, or even indicate the totality of the faith.[13] John uses the words to express the present aspect of salvation in terms of his so-called realized eschatology; the Messiah, when he comes, will show (*anangelei*) us all things, Jn. 4:25. In contrast, Paul and Luke use the words in a variety of ways, from simply giving notice (Acts 21:26, *diangello*), to inform (II Cor. 7:7) etc. In contrast to John they are proclaiming a completed or a

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[13] *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1975-78), p. 48.

coming event. The material being proclaimed is new to the hearers, I Cor. 9:14, and becomes active as it is recited and received.

Angello and its compounds have been adopted into a group of telling and disclosing verbs, adopted first by the translators of the LXX, and then by the writers of the New Testament. In that process they have come to mean 'proclamation in a special, technical sense: they make known the activities of God, his will to save'.[14] The self understanding of the church is inextricably linked to this task of proclaiming Christ to the world in a verbal proclamation which is characterized as good news. It follows that the proclamation of the church is situated in the activity described as evangelism or evangelization which David Bosch defines as,

> that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed, and in the light of particular conditions and of a particular context, offers each person and community everywhere a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical re-orientation of their lives, a re-orientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as its Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted in his service of reconciliation, peace and justice on earth, and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.[15]

1.2.3.2 *Kerysso*

Associated with the verb *kerysso* translated as, to announce, to make known, and to proclaim aloud, are *keryx*, a herald; and *kerygma* translated as a proclamation, announcement, or preaching. As we have noted, this second verb of proclamation is also linked with publishing the gospel of Christ, but because of the association with pagan cults the words are carefully deployed and controlled by Christian theology. In classical Greek the terms derive from the noun *keryx*, the herald, who, as an official of the state cult, was commissioned by his ruler or state, to make important announcements in a clear voice to the citizens of the city state. The content of his message came to be known as the *kerygma* and could mean, as with the derivatives of *angello*, 'a mere report', or alternatively as 'an authoritative command'.[16] As L.

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[14] Ibid. p. 46.
[15] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, (New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 420.
[16] *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. by Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1975-78), p. 48.

Coenen indicates, 'the binding, commanding, and settling nature of this proclamation distinguishes *kerysso* and its cognates from *angello* and its compounds, which refer rather to the imparting of information, or making of an offer'.[17]

In the New Testament *keryx* occurs only three times and even *kerygma* is not widely used, though *kerysso* is used 61 times. Clearly *kerygma* is as suspect as *keryx* and is treated cautiously. In Mt.12:41 par. Lk.11:32 the writers refer to the *kerygma* (preaching) of Jonah but this refers as much to the content of the message as the activity. Jonah was under a divine commission to deliver an authoritative message which included the threat of judgment and an invitation to salvation.[18] Clearly proclamation experienced as *kerygma* involves a call to decision and action which is understood to have far reaching consequences for the hearers.

L. Coenen notes that,

> an analysis of the grammatical object of the vb. reveals that in early passages of Paul [...] and in some Marcan [...] and Matthean [...] contexts the object is *to euangelion*, the gospel; while in the Corinthian letters [...], Phil. 1:15 and Acts [...] it is *Christos* (4 times) *Iesous* (3 times) or Christ Jesus who is proclaimed.[19]

The New Testament conception of proclamation relates to a process of telling, the content of which needs closer definition than the verb *kerysso* itself provides. It is drawn into the family of verbs of telling, reporting, and communicating which indicate a means of communication but not the content of the message. It exists alongside *didasko*, to teach, *angello*, to report, *lego*, to say, *homologeo*, to confess, and *martyreo*, to bear witness, of which no single verb dominates or becomes a technical or theologically pregnant term. The message itself is determined by revelation and is centred on the death,1 Cor. 2:2.; and resurrection, 1 Cor. 15:1f; of Christ, which is proclaimed as the basis of life. Christian proclamation, described as *kerysso*, therefore becomes a public and authoritative announcement which calls for a response.

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[17] Ibid. p. 50.
[18] Ibid. p. 53.
[19] Ibid. p. 52.

1.2.4 PROCLAMATION AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

We have seen that numerical decline in the churches has been attributed to new formations of secularization in post-war Britain, a view which still seemed valid in the mid 1960s. In fact the so-called secularization of society has not led to the loss of religious belief which is still widespread in British society. It appears that what T. C. E. understood as secularization, was in fact only an indicator of wider cultural changes, which we can now describe as postmodernity. In order to effectively proclaim the gospel in the third millennium, the church must move beyond the T. C. E. notion of secularization, and learn to proclaim the gospel within new cultural configurations. This is not an entirely new experience for the European church, which has flourished within the earlier cultures of pre-modernity and modernity. Because the church must now work within a postmodern culture it will be helpful briefly to note how a proclamation of the gospel has successfully functioned within those cultural configurations.

1.2.4.1 PRE-MODERNITY

By pre-modernity, I mean that period prior to the mid-eighteenth century, which we can describe as pre-industrial. Social order was maintained by a hereditary, land owning hierarchy, in which the king and nobility maintained stability against the chaos of invasion, internal rebellion, plague, and famine. The role of the individual was assigned by birth and was understood as part of a divine ordering, in which God ordained kings and their agents to rule, and people to obey. The individual was largely subsumed by the community which existed for the common good, and which itself was bound by contractual obligations to the lord of the manor, or later to the squire. The majority of people lived and worked in static rural communities and had limited contact with urban centres. This meant that most people lived the whole of their lives within the community of their birth.

Apart from the social and economic self identity bestowed by pre-modernity, the church further extended the definition by placing life within a larger context. The church told a story in which humankind although created perfect, had sinned and lost

its first innocence, thereby incurring the penalty of eternal damnation. Happily, salvation was possible through the atonement of Christ, and life was lived against the background of the hope of salvation and the fear of damnation. The church effectively defined reality, and its role was uncontested in the rural environment of pre-modern Europe: it alone disclosed the truth about humankind and the world. The church appeared to have answered every question which both peasant and philosopher had ever asked; civilization in Europe meant Christian civilization. In such circumstances proclamation of the gospel was not shaped as evangelization, aimed at winning unbelieving or uncommitted members of the community; it was understood as instruction in sound doctrine, the administration of the sacraments, and confirmation in the faith. As Peter Berger reminds us, pre-Enlightenment society is a state of affairs where faith is not a matter of personal decision: 'it is simply the acceptance of what everybody accepts because it is obviously the case. There is no alternative and no personal choice'.[20]

The idea that evangelization should produce a new Christendom still inspires some Christian thinkers who bemoan the current pluralism of postmodernity.[21] We must remember however, that under the conditions of pre-modernity a homogenous society was maintained by suppressing the expressive self and promoting the notion of obedient and compliant communities as a divine requirement. Clearly these features of pre-modern society offer no model for proclamation within a postmodern culture.

1.2.4.2 MODERNITY

By modernity I mean that period from the European Enlightenment to the early decades of the twentieth century, during which the application of practical intelligence transformed the production processes of pre-modernity. Methods of production became increasingly mechanized and centralized into new urban populations, and

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[20] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: S.P.C.K. 1989), p. 40.

[21] Gean E. Veith, *Guide to Contemporary Culture* (Leicester: Crossway Books, 1994), p. 166. Veith quoting Charles Colson claims that absolute standards in politics and government should reflect "God's immutable moral laws."

ancestral contract laws were weakened by the development of new market opportunities. Practical intelligence, or reason, came to be understood as a liberating force which could be applied to every area of life, including science, philosophy, and even religion.

This turn to the rational subject was reflected in philosophy by such thinkers as René Descartes (1596-1650) who considered that the essence of selfhood was the thinking subject, hence his famous adage, *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. Under the influences of Enlightenment thought, a new autonomous individualism was emerging, which came to understand itself as freed from convention, custom, the constrains of community, and the coercive influence of church and state. Within this new cultural context the autonomous self became more prominent, and the pre-modern notion of community weakened.

Clearly, in order to proclaim the gospel within these new cultural complexities the church had to adapt its message, taking full account of notions of the autonomous self. The evangelization associated with the revival movements of the eighteenth century, were one response to the prevailing rationalism which had become so influential within religious and secular thought. Methodism in particular, under the leadership of the brothers John and Charles Wesley, injected a new emotional intensity into the proclamation of the church; not least through a new hymnology which was disseminated far and wide by the Methodist societies, which grew rapidly from the mid eighteenth century. Whilst the leaders of the revival movements made no direct appeal to reason as a primary authority in their preaching, they assumed that conversion to Christ required a considered and rational response. The individualism associated with a turn to the subject had been thoroughly absorbed by the emerging leaders of the new movements, whose preaching called for a response from autonomous moral agents.

Within the culture of pre-modernity the story of the church gave meaning and hope to the homogenous communities of Europe. The turn to the rational subject which we have associated with the European Enlightenment, altered perceptions of selfhood and called for new approaches to preaching the gospel. The Methodists of

the eighteenth century clearly illustrate how one section of the church was able to respond to this new situation and effectively proclaim the gospel within the prevailing culture. Their stress on an individual response to the proclamation of the gospel, demonstrates how they were able to work within the new configurations of Enlightenment thought. Clearly the church in Europe has been able to effectively proclaim its message within the cultural configurations of pre-modernity and modernity. The question now arises, can the church effectively proclaim the gospel within the new cultural configurations of postmodernity ? I will argue that it can, even though, as we will see, it has conspicuously failed to do so during the last half century.

1.3 POSTMODERNITY

How, then, are we to understand postmodernity, and the notions of selfhood which arise from it ? Before outlining its contours we need to distinguish it from postmodernism which refers to a critical and analytical movement within art, literature, film, and philosophy. Postmodernity refers more specifically to changes which are taking place at global, social, and political levels, and which affect the way we think about the world, ourselves, and religion. The 'post' prefix has become all pervasive in Western society, uniting such concepts as post-industrial, post-colonial, post-communist, and other post sub-plots, into one epic drama, in which a new consciousness of the world and the self are emerging. It is within these newly emerging configurations, with their sensibilities and impulses, that the church must attempt to gain a new hearing.

Seven features of a postmodern society are noteworthy. First, postmodernity has a tendency to dissolve cultural boundaries; it blends high classical and elitist culture with low brow or popular culture. The virtuoso violinist Nigel Kennedy has illustrated this tendency by playfully adopting a punk style of dress for his classical recitals. Kennedy's performances surprised and confused his audiences by creating the visual image of a rock star whilst playing Brahms and Vivaldi. He succeeded in blending opposite poles of the cultural spectrum into one event. The dissolving of boundaries of any kind raises questions about self identity. We will see in chapter four

that, within a postmodern culture, notions of identity can become confused; a tendency which, in its most extreme form, can lead to the adoption of multiple or serial identities.

Second, the notion of truth has become obscured with a high tolerance for pluralism and even contradiction. Social theories or metadiscourses, which legitimized political or utopian systems are now treated with some caution and even suspicion. In this spirit Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern as 'incredulity toward metanarratives', by which he means, any theoretical or social system which justifies itself as a grand narrative.[22] If, within a postmodern society, truth can no longer be presented as a privileged metanarrative, then the insights and beliefs of previously marginalized groups can be welcomed and even celebrated. Other voices, representing gays, blacks, formally colonialized peoples, alternative medicine practitioners, New Age theorists, and fundamentalist expressions of world religions, can be heard in a democratic marketplace of ideas. The unwillingness or inability to adopt a single belief system sets the scene for a new pluralism. Within these new cultural formations notions of selfhood can easily become ambiguous. Increasingly personal identity and lifestyle is understood to be a personal choice, or a construct, which creates a problem for any truth claim which purports to reveal an absolute truth which is binding upon all.

Third, it follows that there is an ambivalence toward science as the arbiter of certain truth. Notwithstanding all the material benefits and new technologies that the Enlightenment application of practical intelligence has bestowed upon the world, it is now also perceived as the means of producing weapons of mass destruction and environmental degradation. In addition, 'metaphor, symbol, ritual, sign, and myth, long maligned by those interested only in "exact" expressions of rationality, are today being rehabilitated'.[23] We have seen that from the 1970s these features again became visible in New Age expressions of religion, creating some confusion about how the

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[22] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1979) p. xxiv.
[23] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 353.

gospel might best be proclaimed to people living under the conditions of postmodernity.

Fourth, the ambivalence towards a metanarrative model of understanding history works against the notion of a stable narrative self. Belief systems which hold that history is moving towards a necessary fulfillment are able to understand life as a narrative which is moving towards a meaningful future. In a postmodern culture this sense of life experienced as a meaningful journey is minimal, and emphasis is placed upon the present. As if to compound the problem, the loss of an interpretive structure means that life is increasingly lived as a series of loosely connected episodes. It has become fragmented, with self defining institutions such as marriage, family, work, and leisure, experienced as distinct and unrelated activities or experiences. This resulting loss of a narrative form of experience has a profoundly disorientating effect upon the notion of selfhood, and works against any large scale evangelism, in which a verbal proclamation discloses an ultimate reality.

Fifth, the citizen is increasingly defined as a consumer within a world market. The overproduction of goods in affluent societies had, by the 1980s, led to new rounds of unemployment which were countered by the production of new flexible manufacturing methods, which concentrated on supplying ephemeral fashion goods to a market stimulated by advertising. The Benetton clothing company for example developed a sales strategy bases on 'the colour of the month'.[24] The postmodern expressive self is increasingly empowered by artifacts and recycled styles which create a new, albeit temporary, selfhood. Consumption has accelerated as society has shifted from the consumption of goods to services. David Harvey refers to personal, business, educational, and health services, which have proliferated under the conditions of postmodernity, but also to 'entertainments, spectacles, happenings, and distractions. The lifetime of such services [...] though hard to estimate, is far shorter than that of an automobile or washing machine'.[25]

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[24] David Lyon, 'Anything in the Post ?', *Third Way*, April 1996, p. 20.
[25] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 285.

Sixth, advertising has became an art form in its own right and, via media images, has become part of a management strategy to sell the good life to the most inaccessible potential consumer. Under such circumstances consuming has become a moral directive in a so-called mass culture, in which the image deployed increasingly defines notions of selfhood and value. Citizens, students, patients and church goers can all be reclassified as target audiences, to whom a message can be delivered. Even religion can be promoted as a product.

> the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed.* It must be "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy". The pluralist situation is, above all, a *market situation.* In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities.[26]

Advertising is no longer built around the idea of informing or promoting in the ordinary sense but is increasingly linked to the manipulation of desire. Messages are designed to fund the individual ethos of self development, providing the means to transcend the situated self. Advertising messages provide a new sign system and a range of images which enable a new self, however temporary, to be imagined. Style and artifacts, in terms of car, clothing, home, holiday destinations etc are translated into cultural currency designed to fund the expressive self. Even theologies and religious images are recycled and reshaped by artists like Madonna who skillfully blend them with sexual fantasies. Images which promote the individual ethos of self development are commodifiable and become selling messages. Clearly this phenomenon raises questions about how the gospel can be presented as a message which calls for a response to the work of Christ. It is easily regarded as just one of the selling messages with which a postmodern culture is saturated.

Seventh, the globalization of culture is now a feature of postmodernity and is reflected in many areas, not least in the ability of information technology to link individuals or communities across the world. National and physical boundaries are no longer barriers to communication, and people inhabiting the most isolated regions on

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[26] J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be* (London: S.P.C.K. 1995), p. 43.

earth, can, via computer technology, access specialized data banks, hold conferences, make decisions, and exchange information and money. A notable example of a global tribe which remains in constant contact with its members is that of graffiti artists, who were once regarded as vandals, but now exist as an international movement, hosting international exhibitions, producing specialized magazines, and having their own web site on the Internet. The local home community can now becomes a base, with satellite communities revolving around it which can be accessed by computer, on the Internet, and by E.mail. Cyberspace has become a medium of instant omnipresence. Communication is no longer simply the passing of information; it has become a sophisticated entertainment and an art form in its own right.

The question arises, can verbal proclamation ever realize its hopes in a postmodern society ? Can it address the notions of selfhood which we have noted, showing that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, who is leading humanity towards its ultimate goal of redemption ? If the notion of ultimate truth is deemed to be beyond the capacity of language to convey, and if truth itself is understood as simply the preferences of individuals or groups, how then can Christian proclamation be taken seriously ? In addition, in a mass culture, messages which claim to know what is good for us are likely to be interpreted as selling messages, which aim to manipulate desire, and are therefore treated with some suspicion. We have also noted the tendency within postmodernity to dissolve boundaries between elitist and popular culture. We have seen that salvation motifs which aim to disclose the purposes of God, may also be dissolved, recycled, and blended with New Age theories in what amounts to a rebirth of religion. Clearly verbal proclamation could operate successfully within pre-modernity or modernity, but can it be effective within a postmodern culture?

I maintain that the gospel can be proclaimed effectively within a postmodern society, and that people can respond to its call for repentance and faith. This does not imply that the church must in some way silence other voices and establish Christianity as a privileged metadiscourse; the Christian voice can be heard in the marketplace of religious pluralism, as one voice amongst others as we shall see in chapter two.

Religious pluralism calls for entrepreneurial approaches which can be effective in proclaiming Christ. The Christian entrepreneur believes that the life and teaching of Jesus still attract and fascinate many people, who are open to understanding the significance of Jesus for the contemporary world. Perhaps all would be lost if postmodernity implied post-religion, but, as we have seen, it emphatically does not.

The notion of repentance which calls for a change of mind and direction is central to Jesus's teaching, Mk. 1:15. and makes the assumption that people can adopt a new way of thinking about themselves, the world, and God. We have noted that verbal proclamation aims to engage the mind of the hearer and call attention to the Christian message, but we have also claimed that God is himself active within this process. Effectiveness is not related simply to excellence of presentation or argument, but also to the activity of God, which can not be quantified. In spite of many specific difficulties there is no reason to suppose that verbal proclamation is untenable in a postmodern culture. We therefore need to ask, how can the gospel best be articulated in a postmodern society ? This question can be reserved for my third and fourth chapter; we can however say at this stage, that Christian proclamation must be so presented that it enables the postmodern imagination to conceive of a renewed selfhood resituated within the rule of God. Clearly, as we shall now see, the three major evangelistic initiatives which have taken place in England during the last 50 years have failed to accomplish this task. In order to deploy a new model of proclamation we need to describe the initiatives and ask, why were they so ineffective?

1.4 THREE MAJOR EVANGELISTIC INITIATIVES SINCE 1945

The first initiative was started by archbishop William Temple in the form of a commission which produced a report entitled *Towards The Conversion Of England* (T. C. E.) and was presented to the church synod at Whitsun 1945. The commissioners anticipated the return of men and women from war service and the prospect of ministering to a traumatized population. They noted the deep decline in

personal and national morality, and industrial chaplains had warned that factory workers were more deeply secularized than ever.[27]

The second notable event which, like the above, was conceived of as having a national impact, was the Billy Graham Greater London Crusade (G. L. C.) which was promoted by the Evangelical Alliance, and ran in Harringay Arena for twelve weeks from 1 March 1954. Graham indicated that he hoped to 'light a spark that may some day ignite something'.[28]

The Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism (N. I. E.) was a third project which was launched by the so- called Lambeth group led by Archbishop Donald Coggan in April 1977, although the executive body, the Initiative committee, was not formed until January 1979. The aim of the Initiative was to encourage and equip churches to work together in their localities with a view to penetrating their communities with the gospel, and, as the project title indicates, it was an attempt to cover the nation as a whole.

1.4.1 TOWARDS THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND

1.4.1.1 METHOD

The T. C E. initiative called upon the Anglican clergy to train the laity for new evangelistic outreach whilst recognizing that many of the clergy themselves were not adequately equipped for the task. The role of the clergy is discussed in the third chapter, where it is noted that the parish will be no more energetic than its pastor who is urged to rediscover a converting ministry. He is described as trained for pastoral work, overtaken by a feeling of inadequacy, isolated, and approaching apathy on occasions. He stands in need of a new baptism of the Holy Spirit.[29] The commission bemoans the loss of biblical preaching and the expectation of conversions; priests are all too often tongue tied when it comes to personal witness and have lost the desire to read the bible, overwhelmed as they are with administration and pastoral routine. In

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[27] *Towards the Conversion of England*, (London: Church Assembly, 1945), pp. 2-3.
[28] William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 174.

[29] *Towards the Conversion of England* (London: Church Assembly, 1945), pp. 40-41.

spite of an army of preacher/pastors the report acknowledged the church's failure to effectively proclaim the faith.

The picture painted of the laity is also somewhat depressing, and the church itself is described on several occasions as only half converted,[30] 'a field for evangelism, rather than a force for evangelism'.[31] Nevertheless the renewed laity must become that force and their role is described in pages 50-64. In fact the renewal of the laity is envisioned as the leading edge of national renewal. The clergy must help them to overcome their shyness. Parochial councils should call convocations aiming to deepen the spiritual life of the parish, use of the cell method for bible study and prayer is recommended, with a general attitude of waiting upon the Holy Spirit. Parochial witness teams should be formed, which can work in several parishes, with training provided by clergy. The commissioners urge the laity to return to family prayers and bible reading, witnessing to Christ in the workplace, in their trade unions, employers associations, and private activities. Clearly the leadership model was a top down structure in which the executive branch, the commissioners, motivated the clergy who trained the laity to become effective evangelists.

The question is then asked, 'how can the whole Church, mobilized and trained for evangelism, proclaim the gospel to all our country-men and prepare their hearts to receive it?' [32] In chapter four *Evangelism, Proclaiming The Gospel*, the commissioners edge towards an answer. Inner Groups must be formed to evangelize parish organizations, and Cells For Witness should form to stimulate study and prayer, and provide general encouragement. Teams of Witness should plan local evangelism projects, and Vocational teams should meet in the workplace to take Christ to their fellow workers.[33] The new situation of a falling membership, and of a disturbing new national mood, is well understood and is met by a wealth of imaginative thinking. The commissioners call for a renewal of the clergy who must train and encourage a dispirited laity for new initiatives in evangelism. This was

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[30] Ibid. p. 54.
[31] Ibid. p. 55.
[32] Ibid. p. 63.
[33] Ibid. pp. 70-71.

perceived as an unrealistic demand in the immediate aftermath of W.W.II, and replies from the dioceses were less than enthusiastic.

1.4.1.2 REASONS FOR FAILURE

The initiative functioned as a recall to pre-war values and attitudes which no longer existed in the country at large. The notion of a post-war era was the first hint of a more pervasive post prefix which in the next half century would come to signify a deep cultural shift. The church commissioners understood the initiative to be a recall from a secularized culture, and implicitly understood the church to be on the outside. They failed to see that what they understood as secularization was in fact an indicator of a deeper cultural shift, which as we have seen is not necessarily antagonistic to the notion of faith.

In 1945 postmodernity was not a clearly identifiable idea and the commission could not have planned their approach against the background that we have considered as postmodern. They were however aware of changes in society, which it seems they did not clearly understand, and therefore did not address adequately. The final report does not attempt to analyze the direction and nature of post-war society, and then ask how the church might best engage with it, rather it functions as a recall to faith. In the aftermath of the devastation of Europe, when the prophetic voice of the church might have contributed towards a vision for the future, the church seemed to be offering more of the same. The first post-war church commission might have offered a theological understanding of past traumas, and, like Simone Weil in her manifesto for post-war France, the *Need for Roots,* it might have prophetically indicated new political, economic, and spiritual configurations for the future, but such a breadth of vision was absent from the report.

The leading edge of renewal was understood to be a discouraged clergy and laity who were, to say the least, half hearted about the role assigned to them. The diocese of York responded by drawing attention to the low morale of the clergy.

> Perhaps not all in the church are aware how low clerical hopes have fallen and how tense is the struggle to endure when so much seems to be collapsing [...]

> Even those who have faith in God and his Holy Church cannot be insensitive to a dying civilization of which they are a part.[34]

Clearly the report portrays the chuch as standing outside of the new cultural configurations which they had understood as secularization. Rather than adopting an entrepreneurial approach to evangelization as the Methodists of the eighteenth century had done, they continued to depend upon a privileged metanarrative, in which the church functioned as the guardians of the nation's sacred traditions to which people could be recalled. The failure of the nation to heed the call amounted to a shattering of the narrative world of the church's proclamation. This failure to draw the nation back to the faith of the church, tended to emphasize the need for a choice between a sacred or a secular account of reality. The church and the prevailing culture seemed to exist at opposite poles, and by the mid 1960s the notion of a dialogue with the prevailing culture seemed to be increasingly unlikely.

The massive disruptions of World War II had traumatized a whole generation: life had been suspended for five years and by 1945 people were in the mood for change, nothing could be quite the same again. What the T. C. E understood as secularization was celebrated by those who had anticipated the position of D. L. Munby and Arend van Leeuwen, but was understood by the diocese of York to be a breakdown of civilization. C. S. Lewis in his essay *God In The Dock,* draws our attention to the bright young airmen to whom he lectured in 1947. He notes their confident assertiveness of which two features are noteworthy. First, they are quite capable of thinking seriously about religion, but do not limit their thoughts to traditional notions of theism. Lewis shows that these men who had presumably recently returned from war service in various parts of the world, were now open minded enough to sympathetically consider a number of non-Christian creeds.[35] Not only were they confident enough to consider alternatives to Christianity, they were capable of sustaining an intelligent criticism of it. The airmen to whom he lectures

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[34] This information is taken from letters of reply from the diocese which I read in the Church of England archives in Southwark London 10.12.96.

[35] C. S. Lewis, 'God in the Dock', in *God in the Dock* (Glasgow: Collins, 1982), pp. 95-101 (p. 96).

did not stand in awe of God; they did not regard themselves as being in his dock; he was in their dock, and if he could satisfactorily explain a creation filled with war, disease, and poverty, he might be acquitted.[36] Lewis sees that these men were no longer dependent upon the Christian story in order to make their lives intelligible. Clearly this new situation called for skilled apologists who might have reinterpreted the Christian story in terms of the experience of this immediate post-war generation, but the commissioners do not understand proclamation in these terms. The initiative failed to proclaim the gospel to the nation because the nation had passed beyond the horizon of the church.

1.4.2 THE GREATER LONDON CRUSADE

The Billy Graham G. L. C. clearly had an impact upon the nation well beyond the environs of London. It is no exaggeration to say that in 1954 his name became a household word and coachloads of people travelled to Harringay from the regions. Graham was attractive to the post-war English population and enabled people to seriously re-evaluate their attitute towards Christianity.

1.4.2.1 METHOD

Graham understood the power of a well presented message and projected an image of exciting religion and the confident preacher. His style and persona had more in common with a Hollywood production than an English pulpit: he spoke with a blazing intensity, strode around the stage, and punched the air for effect. The crusade meetings were like professionally orchestrated stage shows, with mass choirs, first rate soloists, celebrity guests, and all choreographed to perfection. He played with his audience like any pop star, and they responded enthusiastically. In 1954 the idea of a postmodern society was restricted to intellectual and artistic circles but Graham seemed to have an instinct which enabled him to anticipate some of the emerging features of postmodernity. He saw that religion had to be repackaged and sold, reluctant buyers had to be enticed and persuaded to come and look. The repackaged

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[36] Ibid. p. 100.

message came in the style of the revival meetings so familiar to the Baptist and Pentecostal churches of the Southern United States. Steve Turner reminds us that the early Rock and Roll stars were from the South and many were themselves inspired by the music and style of Southern revivalism. Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis consciously adopted the styles of preachers and gospel quartets.[37] The Britain of the 1950s was still recovering from the shock of war and still experiencing some austerity measures. America, in contrast, had come to symbolize the good life, quite out of the reach of the average Briton. Graham represented the age of the Cadillac, Coca Cola, chewing gum, expensive suits, and the Pepsident smile. His arrival at Waterloo station created hysteria: women fainted, children were passed over the heads of the crowds to safety, and newspaper stands were overturned.[38] Graham was achieving the status of stardom before the pop era had got under way.

By means of an instant experience of conversion Graham allowed his audience to leave their worries at home and imagine themselves as enlarged and renewed. His sermons had the quality of slogans, offering Peace with God, All Problems Solved, and Marriages Saved. The psychology of conversion promoted by Graham anticipated the postmodern notion of life experiences as fragmented episodes. Before deciding for Christ at Harringay people were unsaved, whilst a positive response indicated a new state of salvation, and life thereafter was to be sanctified and secure. Unlike T. C. E. Graham knew he was operating in an open market of religious wants and needs, and encouraged such questions as, 'what's in it for me?' Indeed his sermons were answers to that sort of question. All that was needed was to believe, to trust, to come down to the front, to fill out a card. It was religion experienced as a new self, an instant recreation. The postmodern writer Roland Barthes' notion of *jouissance*, which is best translated as 'sublime physical or mental bliss', which he places above mere pleasure, is the state of mind in which thousands of people left the Harringay arena.[39]

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[37] Steve Turner, *Hungry For Heaven* (London: Virgin, 1988), p. 14.
[38] William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 177.
[39] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 57.

Graham understood the power of advertising; his face and name appeared all over London and the national press gave him constant attention. In preparation for his crusade Graham organized a massive advertising campaign which cost fifty thousand pounds and won an award from the British Publicity Club.[40] The message was the offer of salvation through Christ, but consciously or unconsciously it was subliminally blended with images of the success/wealth culture associated with North American materialism. The message was directed not so much towards the intellect but towards feelings and emotions to which the crusade, as a visual and verbal spectacular, appealed. Verbal proclamation in this context amounted to the manipulation of desire by advertising, which as we have noted is a feature of a postmodern culture. The leadership style associated with the G. L. C. was also a top down model based upon the charismatic personality of Graham himself; his clear intent was to seize the initiative and make religion appear attractive to the British people. In fact never since 1954 has religion been covered by the national media in such depth and for such a sustained period. Graham could well have left Britain feeling that he had indeed created a spark which had a potential to renew the Christian faith in Britain.

1.4.2.2 REASONS FOR FAILURE

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has estimated that, with the aid of associate evangelists, two million people came to the various meetings with 36,431 decisions for Christ recorded. There was however to be no revival of faith. Seven months after the crusade ended the London Evening Standard organized a poll amongst twenty of the largest Anglican churches in the city. They assessed that if these churches were typical of the country at large, then only four thousand people were presently still attending church, a mere eleven percent of those registered.[41] What had gone wrong?

Within a postmodern culture, histories, styles, images, and even theologies, are recycled by the expressive self in order to create a temporary self transcendence which amounts only to playful experimentation. Graham understood how to make a religious

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[40] William Martin, *The Billy Graham Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 174.
[41] Ibid. p. 184.

message attractive, but perhaps he had not understood that in the emerging postmodern culture of Britain, messages, like identities, were destined to be used and discarded rapidly. New identities were to become marketable commodities with only a limited shelf life. Of course Graham, as a religious fundamentalist, believed he was communicating a message of timeless significance which conveyed absolute truths about God and humanity. It seems however, that his style and razzmatazz was in the long term more attractive than his timeless truth. In a postmodern culture, images of the good life are often driven by service industries related to advertising or entertainment, which promote new styles and identities. It may be that the G. L. C. served the purpose of a temporary service industry providing new religious images of the good life which had little enduring value.

Graham held pop star status for a short period but pop stars rise and fall. He brought glamour into the austerity conditions of the 1950s, but for all his sincerity and charm a large proportion of his converts never became committed members of the churches. Like the emerging selfhood which we have associated with the postmodern condition, they were just looking, experimenting with an identity which in the summer months of 1954 was apparently discarded by many. Graham's proclamation created many converts but it seems that the majority never became actively involved in the life of the churches which supported his mission. When the Harringay spectacular ended there remained only the churches which, like the T. C. E. initiative, seemed ill at ease within the new post-war culture. Billy Graham himself for all his attractiveness, did not attempt to enter a dialogue with our culture. Rather, and like the T. C. E., his evangelism amounted to a recall to those certainties which he understood to be central to the proclamation of the gospel.

Many of Graham's converts never became disciples because they were never effectively linked with the believing community in which instruction, nurture, and the nature of Christian hope are disclosed. The churches could not maintain the flair, style, and communication skills, associated with the G. L. C. which had proved attractive to so many. This deficiency which it seems was not anticipated, meant that the intellectual traditions and moral disciplines of the faith were never effectively

passed on, and many converts were left without the sustenance which new life in Christ requires. Archbishop Fisher commenting on the crusade three years after the event concluded that, 'there is very little to show [for it]'.[42]

1.4.3 THE NATIONWIDE INITIATIVE IN EVANGELISM

The N. I. E. was a response to the deepening secularization of British culture. The 1960s had continued to be a period of continued decline in church membership and John Robinson's book *Honest to God* had stunned the evangelical wing of the church. Increasing numbers of church leaders decided that something had to be done in terms of a new national initiative in evangelization. Roger Whitehead and Amy Sneddon draw attention to three documents which arose at the same time from quite different traditions within the church. Each of them dealt with evangelization and appeared to converge in thought and spirit in significant ways.[43]

- In 1974 the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization stressed the need to take the social implications of the gospel more seriously. To many evangelicals this was a new emphasis and seemed to promise new hope of engaging with a secularized society.
- In 1975 the World Council of Churches held its fifth Assembly in Nairobi on the theme Confessing Christ Today stressing the need to make disciples, a reaction to a rampant secularization.
- During the same year Pope Paul VI published *Evangelii Nuntandi* - Evangelizing the Modern World. It seemed reasonable to assume that what was perceived as the secularization of society might enable different church traditions to draw closer. Would it be possible in Britain to plan evangelism together ?

1.4.3.1 METHOD

David Clark reminds us that,

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[42] Ibid. pp. 184 -185.
[43] Roger Whitehead & Amy Sneddon, *An Unwanted Child? The Story of the N. I. E* (London: B.C.C./C.C.B.I. 1990), p. 1.

> the N. I. E. had two main concerns; first to further "intelligent and effective evangelism" and secondly, to bring every major denomination in the country into a form of partnership toward that end.[44]

In order to realize this vision, the Lambeth Group formed the Council of Reference, which set tasks for the executive working group known as the Initiative Committee, but there was tension between the groups from the beginning. The spirit of ecumenism never became a reality. For some, the Initiative was not evangelical enough, for others it was in constant danger of being hi-jacked by triumphalist evangelicals. Whilst society was beginning to celebrate pluralism as an ideology the Initiative was withdrawing into its old tribalisms.

Progress was planned in five stages.[45] The first two stages related to the local churches, which were to be motivated and enabled to proclaim the gospel actively to their local communities by the N. I. E. support groups established at county level. Stages three and four involved contacting specified unevangelized groups, developing new methods of evangelism on their behalf, and conveying the findings to the churches. Stage five was to be located in the 1990s, and involved fully integrating the new insights into the churches, thus equipping them for a renewed ministry of proclamation. The Initiative Committee members were understood to be the experts, who would study new approaches to evangelism, and feed ideas and information to working groups established at regional or county level, who in turn would relate to the churches. It was again a top down leadership model and communication with the churches at the bottom level was erratic.

1.4.3.2 REASONS FOR FAILURE

By the 1970s the postmodern nature of society was becoming clearer, and the notion of a postmodern fragmented society was understood by the Initiative Committee and attested by their intention to study a variety of unevangelized segments of society. To recognize the existence of such groups was one thing, but to establish new

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[44] David Clark, *The Liberation of the Church* (Birmingham: The National Centre for Christian Communications and Networks, Westhill College, 1984), p. 64.

[45] Ibid. p. 63. For a more detailed account see Roger Whitehead & Amy Sneddon. *An Unwanted Child? The Story of the N. I. E*, (London: B.C.C./C.C.B.I. 1990), pp. 121-124.

evangelistic initiatives among them was quite another. Roger Whitehead and Amy Sneddon draw attention to working groups set up to study specific unevangelized people groups, whose work was either ignored or abandoned before any insights could be gained.[46]

It is one thing to recognize the fragmented nature of postmodern society, but quite another to creatively engage with it by establishing the dialogue which we have seen to be necessary. It seems that specific groups were identified and studied, not in order to develop new evangelistic ministries among them, but to determine how best they might be recalled to the certainties of the gospel. In this respect the N. I. E. shared the assumptions of T. C. E. and the G. L. C. Not only did the N. I. E. fail to sympathetically engage with the groups which they chose to study, but increasingly the various N. I. E. tribes became unable to engage sympathetically with each other. This lack of flexibility of mind and imagination was a fatal flaw ensuring that few insights were gained and no new ministry initiatives were created in which the churches could participate together. Roger Whitehead and Amy Sneddon show that the Initiative appears to have suffered a monumental loss of nerve when faced with the difficulties of creatively engaging with the groups they were studying. A conference to examine ways to work with young people and the pop culture was abandoned. An agenda for action was produced which hoped to work amongst weekend leisure seekers, but, 'Nothing further happened'. A plan was developed to enable churches to work amongst young people at risk (14-22 year olds) but, 'It appeared to have run out of enthusiasm'.[47] It seems that the N. I. E. panicked at the monumental task of carrying the gospel into cultural milieus in which it was deeply uncomfortable. The initiative failed to generate any programme which might be described as entrepreneurial and which might make contact with the postmodern world of religious needs and wants. The pluralistic nature of a postmodern society

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[46] Roger Whitehead & Amy Sneddon, *An Unwanted Child ? The Story of the N. I. E* (London: B.C.C./C.C.B.I. 1990), p. 59. & pp. 125-128.
[47] Ibid. p. 126.

called for a church which could be flexible in its approach, and the N. I. E. lacked this vital quality.

Richard H. Roberts discusses the notion of a postmodern church which purports to bear a message and which wants to operate within a postmodern culture.[48] He reminds us that the entertainment and publicity industries pour vast resources into 'anything and everything which can undergo profitable recapitulation up to, and including, religion and theological ideas and motifs [...]. [In this process] narrative structure is shattered'. He describes the established churches as 'trapped between institutionalized tradition and the marketplace of human needs and wants'. They become locked into a social niche market in which some form of metanarrative still functions e.g. retired people. To go beyond this he feels would require a 'theological revolution' in which a postmodern church would need to adopt a '*principled eclecticism*'. This would involve mobilizing the total resources of the church for the training of its leadership, thus enabling it to appropriate the whole inheritance of the church as a resource. Roberts describes the resources as symbolic, mythic, narrative, ethical, and theological. He claims that 'In the light of tradition and general policy the Christian or religious entrepreneur will have to scrutinize the human condition, the universal market, and seek for points of congruence'.[49]

The N. I. E. showed some promise of appropriating resources beyond the niche markets of its participating groups but soon found that its original ambition to proclaim the gospel to the nation together was beyond its capacity. This loss of nerve was nothing short of a disaster. Unlike the G. L. C., the initiative was all but invisible to the nation and very few projects emerged from the churches as a result of an enormous amount of effort. New culturally relevant ministries never materialized and the major evangelistic enterprise of the 1980s failed to gain a hearing for the gospel on any notable scale.

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[48] Richard H. Roberts, 'A Postmodern Church? Some Preliminary Reflections on Ecclesiology and Social Theory', in *Essentials of Christian Community,* ed. by David F. Ford & Dennis L. Stamps (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark , 1996), pp. 194-5.
[49] Ibid. p. 195.

1.5 DECADE OF EVANGELISM

The main confessional churches have designated the last decade of the twentieth century, a Decade of Evangelism. As we survey the failures of the last half century we must ask, will the Decade be any different, and have we learnt anything from it ? I consider that the initiative has achieved some modest success in remotivating the churches and learning new ministry approaches in the context of a postmodern culture. The initiative is not directed by any denomination or group of experts, and depends upon a bottom up model of leadership in which local and congregational enthusiasm is the essential quality required. There is, in addition, no grand strategy or programme for re-Christianizing the nation. There is no approved method of procedure, no slogan or banner which might point the way ahead, and no mass appeal for conversion.

The idea of a Decade of Evangelism was agreed by Archbishop Robert Runcie and Pope John Paul II in the summer of 1988. The initiative officially commenced in January 1991 and is supported by all the major denominations. It anticipates that existing denominations and networks will work locally and that denominational mission departments and evangelistic agencies will produce the resources which they deem necessary. It also assumes that, wherever possible, there will be ecumenical cooperation and that new good practice will inform mission strategies into the third millennium. Decade strategy has become postmodern in that it encourages local groups to find their own way with a minimum of direction, but with a well defined back up system, with resources provided at denominational level. As a postscript, and to bring us into the 1990s, we will look at the On Fire initiative which was developed as a contribution to the Decade of Evangelism, and which reflected the churches awareness of social change and the emerging postmodern condition.

On Fire was the brainchild of the Oasis Trust led by Baptist minister and T. V. presenter Steve Chalke. Its aim was to allow local churches to meet their non-churchgoing neighbours in a non-threatening environment in which some form of Christian proclamation could be made. The basic idea was to celebrate the birthday of

the church over the weekend of Pentecost i.e. Saturday 21 March to Sunday 22 March 1994. The birthday party was to be on Saturday when every participating church, or group of churches, would hold a carnival, street party, or other high profile fun events to which the whole community could be invited. This was to culminate in a bonfire celebration which would be a highly visible event, as, hopefully, thousands of such fires would light up the face of the nation at sunset - literally. This proclamation style operated not as a recall *to* the church, and *from* an alien culture, but, unlike the three initiatives we have noted, from within the community itself, and in the context of entertainment and leisure.

The Sunday was to be an extension of Saturday inviting the same people to a special user-friendly worship experience with a clear but low powered presentation of the Christian faith. Far from operating as a recall to the church, the church was attempting to become more culturally relevent. In fact it rained over most of the country on the Saturday evening and many events moved indoors, though street events were well attended during the day. Churches emphasized a carnival atmosphere with children's games and competitions etc. It was a day for all the family and many new friendships were created. The churches understood that the good news must enter the market place and that the consumer was king. 1,619 churches registered to take part but anecdotal evidence suggests that double that number participated with some estimates as high as four thousand.[50]

On Fire was not designed as a recall to the church: proclamation recycled theological ideas through entertainment in a carnival setting. This was followed up in the Sunday service which had the atmosphere of a family service with themes extended from the Saturday and expressed in drama, new music styles, and with a high level of congregation participation. It was not anticipated that those who came would necessarily stay, but might attach themselves to the fringe activities of the church. The initiative was a real attempt to understand and engage with the religious needs and wants to which Richard Roberts refers. In spite of this, the national media ignored the initiative, but the B.B.C. religious programme Songs of Praise, set in

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[50] Peter Staley, 'Interim Report from Oasis Trust to the Evangelical Alliance' (unpublished, 1994)

Victoria Square Birmingham, featured it, attended as it was by seven thousand people. There was, of course, no attempt to sustain proclamation at this level, and television evangelism was considered to be out of the question. Rather it called attention to local events and emphasized Pentecost as a celebration, a party.

The community events enhanced ecumenical relationships and churches took significant steps towards meeting their community in an atmosphere of celebration. Oasis have estimated that as a result of the total activity, an average of three new members were added to each participating church.[51] This amounts to 4,857 people who were befriended by the churches, and, assuming they remained, was a better overall result than the G.L.C.

1.6 SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES

The inexorable numerical decline of church membership since 1945 has run in parallel with a fundamental shift in culture in which religious believing is distinguished from belonging. It seems that the British church is only slowly coming to terms with its failure to transmit its faith in this new context. It is also learning that in a world without narrative, cohesion, and interpretive structure, any message which functions as a recall to the old, old story, holds little appeal and operates on the basis of ever diminishing returns.

The three major evangelistic initiatives since 1945 have failed to gain a hearing in the new postmodern marketplace of ever expanding religious choice; and new exotic movements such as Scientology, Eastern Meditation, the Unification Church, and Sokka Gakkai, have become exciting new areas of exploration. At the same time we have noted that orthodox expressions of faith can flourish in a postmodern society, and that the church can effectively proclaim the gospel from within the cultural configurations of postmodernity. It may be that new insights and methodologies are emerging within the framework of the Decade of Evangelism,

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[51] 'The 1994 Evangelism Projects' (unpublished internal review, Evangelical Alliance, 1994), p. 10.

which create room for optimism as we approach the third millennium. it is, however, as David Bosch reminds us, a chastened optimism.

> All around us people are looking for new meaning in life. This is the moment when the Christian church and the Christian mission may once again, humbly yet resolutely, present the vision of the reign of God - not as pie in the sky, but as an eschatological reality which casts its rays, however opaque into the dismal present, illuminates it, and confers meaning on it. It is a road beyond Enlightenment optimism and anti-Enlightenment pessimism.[52]

[52] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis , 1996) pp. 361-2.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS A NEW MODEL OF PROCLAMATION

2.1 PROCLAMATION AS A THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The conspicuous failure of the three evangelistic initiatives from the 1940s to the 1980s draws attention to the need to develop a new model of proclamation which can confidently function within a postmodern context. What Richard Roberts has described as a principled eclecticism, which involves drawing on the total theological inheritance of the church, must enable the religious entrepreneur to deploy new approaches, which enable the church to engage in a dialogue within a postmodern culture. Any new reformation of a theology of proclamation must be capable of: verbally passing on the message of the church, drawing attention to the salvation of Christ, which calls for a response, and overcoming the notion that Christian proclamation is a manipulative device designed to sustain the influence of the church. I submit that these conditions can be met by a restatement of a theology of the cross, in which the church is understood to speak from a position of vulnerability rather than privilege.

2.1.1 ENTERING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Jürgen Moltmann sees that effective proclamation of the gospel calls for a costly surrender on the part of the messenger; a surrender which was supremely made by Christ, but which the apostles and all the messengers of God are required to emulate. Moltmann sees that what he calls the community of Christ, is brought into being through the sufferings and vulnerability of the messengers of God, who consent to participate in the sufferings of Christ. He describes the life of Christ as a history of a great passion, 'a passionate surrender to God and his kingdom'.[1] In contrast he sees

[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), p. 151.

that a modern ideal society shuns pain and attempts to overcome suffering, happiness has come to mean, to be painlessly happy. This he regards as life without passion, which is poverty stricken.

In order to effectively proclaim the gospel, words must be found which describe the gospel as God's response to human need. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ, must be placed within a context which allows them to be seen as a saving event. In order to contextualize the good news about Jesus within a particular community, the messengers will sometimes encounter resistance, and even hostility, which calls for a willingness to continue in difficult circumstances. Those who work to bring the salvation of God to light must be prepared to accept misunderstanding, rejection, and even persecution, as part of the cost involved in bringing the salvation of God to the attention of unevangelized peoples.

Moltmann sees that this suffering is a participation in the trials of Christ which the apostles and martyrs also endured for Christ's sake.[2] Paul clearly felt that his trials as an apostle were in some way an extension of Christ's passion, Col 1:24. As an extension of this idea Moltmann regards the trials of the apostles as apocalyptic sufferings in which an old world passes away and a new world is born, the community of Christ. Proclamation informed by a theology of the cross requires the messengers of Christ to accept vulnerability and suffering as part of their work. This enables the church to understand its ministry in terms of the sacrificial self giving of Christ.

2.1.2 THE DEATH OF JESUS

Moltmann's description of a passionate surrender to God and his Kingdom as the means by which the Christian community comes to birth is anticipated in the passion sayings of Jesus. Clearly Jesus understood his death to be a service to humanity which had a liberating effect; 'the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many,' Mk. 10:45. His passionate surrender was on behalf of humanity, and he describes his impending violent death as the shedding of

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[2] Ibid. p. 156.

covenant *blood*, Mk. 14: 24. Clearly Jesus understood his death to be on behalf of others. He was doing something for them which they could not do for themselves. In offering covenant blood Jesus was evoking the imagery of temple sacrifice which was understood as a means of approach to God. The death of Jesus brought God and humanity together. Vincent Taylor shows that Christ's death was also a victory over Satan, evil, and death, 'he [Jesus] thought of men as being in bondage to evil and of his death as the means of securing their release'.[3] This idea of overcoming evil through self sacrifice and vulnerability provide a clear indication of the *modus operandi* in which the message of Jesus should be transmitted.

In addition to dying for humanity and opening a means of approach to God by overcoming evil, Jesus also understood his death to be closely related to the kingdom rule of God. Whilst his death does not inaugurate the kingdom, it is nevertheless necessary to establish God's rule. Jesus's choice of the term Son of Man to describe his sufferings, links him with the vision of Dan 7:9-14, in which 'one like a Son of Man' is given a universal worship and dominion over an eternal kingdom. It appears that Jesus identified himself with this figure as he faced his own passion, Mk. 14:62, indicating how closely Jesus associated the idea of God's rule with his sacrificial death. This passionate surrender to God and his kingdom was part of a deliberate plan to draw humanity to God by destroying the powers of evil which prevented people from experiencing his divine rule. The passion sayings of Jesus betray no manipulative intent on his part. His death is not a device to recruit reluctant disciples to a cause, rather it is an emancipating event which potentially opens the kingdom of God to the world. In order to achieve this Jesus becomes a vulnerable but willing victim of evil powers.

This surrender of Jesus is further understood by Taylor to be 'an activity which, in some measure, men are to reproduce'.[4] Therefore the church must embody the self giving sacrificial service which is associated with the death of Jesus. Whilst the proclamation of the gospel is primarily experienced as a verbal event, words must

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[3] Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and his Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan 1959), p. 260.
[4] Ibid. p. 268.

become embodied within a culture of self giving which aims to liberate humanity from every form of evil.

2.1.3 THE FOOLISH APOSTLE

To claim to speak on God's behalf is audacious in the extreme and those who make it must ensure that their claim is not in any way self serving but is seen to be an act of sacrificial service for which no reward or privilege is required. In the *Narrenrede* of II Cor.11:21-12:10. Paul is confronted with the claims of rival leaders who do not hesitate to use manipulative strategies in order to establish their position within the Corinthian church. The conflict begs the question, should Paul use the same methods in order to support his apostolic credentials ? In the correspondence of I Cor. 1:18-2:5 Paul had rejected reliance on the persuasive forces of rhetoric, which he considered stood at odds with the message of the cross. He stood as one who 'came to you in weakness [...] My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom' I Corinthians 2:3,4. The Corinthian church however, still looked for impressive leadership, which demanded submission to authority.

Paul plays the game tongue in cheek and lists his qualifications with rhetorical style. His boasting is however a device which is easily seen as a game which deconstructs the notion of church power politics. 'If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness', he declares, II Corinthians 11:30. Paul disavows the strategy of the false apostles II Cor. 11:13. who demand submission to their authority. He intends to fulfill his ministry as an ambassador of Christ II Corinthians. 5:20, but his cross centredness requires him to pour himself out in service to others. He declares, 'I will most gladly spend and be spent for you'. II Cor. 12:15. His response is an expression of his willingness to share the suffering and rejection of Christ and to work for the establishment and consolidation of the Christian community which is his overriding concern.

Paul's leadership crisis is informed by his understanding of the service which Jesus gave. Whilst, as he shows, it would be easy enough to make a case for his leadership position, any temptation to do so is controlled and limited by his

understanding of what it means to represent Christ. Rather than fight for his rights Paul lists his credentials, his racial background, his sufferings on missionary service, and his daily pastoral labour, but then he undermines them with an admission of his weakness and inadequacy II Cor 11:21a-33. Because Paul is a messenger of the cross, 1 Cor 1:23, he understands that in order to proclaim Christ with integrity he must not press any claim which establishes his rights or privileges. He chooses rather to reproduce the cross rather than to insist on his rights and undermine his opponents.

Christian proclamation can be effective within a postmodern culture. By making a passionate surrender to God and his kingdom, the church can present Jesus Christ as the God appointed Saviour of the world, and call for a response to his work. It is possible to achieve this without any manipulative intention on the part of the messengers, who are able to understand themselves as striving, in partnership with God, to establish the community of Christ by identifying themselves with his suffering, through which the salvific purposes of God are revealed.

2.2 THE CULTURE OF SUSPICION

It should come as no surprise to the church if the prospect of a new preaching of the cross is met with some suspicion by postmodern thinkers. We can anticipate that it might be interpreted as an attempt to reestablish the church in a position of influence and authority within society, in which the church might again become the custodian of the nation's sacred traditions. This would enable the church to again present its faith as *the* public truth, against which all other eccentric views are measured. In such circumstances the church could notionally become deeply intolerant towards other voices and religious pluralism, aiming to silence opposition.

We have seen that advertising has become associated with the manipulation of desire, and that consequently all high profile messages are likely to serve the hidden purposes of the sender, however much they might claim otherwise. It follows that postmodern thinkers are constantly alert to the manipulative intention which is often concealed in a message. This mind set is clearly a potential impediment to the proclamation of the church. On the other hand we have seen that a postmodern society

is still open to exploring religious ideas, and that this can take both orthodox and unorthodox forms. Whilst suspicion can work as an impediment to proclaiming the gospel, a postmodern culture clearly has the capacity to respond to religious messages; especially if they engender feelings of wonder, mystery, and awe. Whilst impediments to a new preaching of the gospel exist in a postmodern culture, so also do new opportunities. In order to grasp the new context in which proclamation must now operate, we must first anticipate some of the features of suspicion which postmodern thinkers have articulated, and which find an echo in our society. We will then be able to identify two approaches which consciously proclaim the gospel against this background, and which have also become expressions of a servant church.

2.2.1 IMPEDIMENTS TO PROCLAMATION

2.2.1.1 FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The philosophy of suspicion is the legacy which Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has bequeathed to the twentieth century. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh in their *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be* consider that he may well rank as the first postmodern philosopher.[5] As we have seen, proclamation requires the presentation of a verbal announcement which is presented in the name of an authoritative sender, thus authority and language are bound together in a single event. Nietzsche's suspicion is levelled at this tyranny of language. He maintained that language, and especially metaphor, disguised the idols of universal truths which he considered to be inherent in language. In his *The Twilight Of The Idols* he declared, 'I fear we shall never be rid of God, so long as we still believe in grammar'.[6] Theism, he claimed, depends upon language to give the impression that it is based upon reason. In fact reason in language is but a 'deceptive old witch'.[7] Truth claims, he maintained, are in reality bids for power which need to be exposed for what they are. In his *The Antichrist* he attacked the underlying motivation behind them. They bestow comfort upon the weak

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[5] J.Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it Used To Be* (London: S.P.C.K.1995), p. 74.
[6] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark), p. 5.
[7] Ibid. p. 6.

producing a slave mentality, and sustain that affirmation of the self by which it can be claimed that, 'the world revolves around me'.[8] As for the clergy and church hierarchies, he considered that their truths empower them and provide the means of controlling the masses. Having gained control they perpetuate 'vicious frauds...systems of cruelty on the strength of which the priest became and remained master'.[9]

2.2.1.2 JACQUES DERRIDA

Nietzsche's thinking has clearly influenced Jacques Derrida, who in his *White Mythology* identifies metaphysics - the white man's mythology, with the reason of Western culture. The history of Western philosophy, Derrida considers, largely rests upon a confusion between 'so-called philosophical metaphors' and the presupposition that these represent truths which constitute 'the solution of important problems'.[10] Metaphors are of course transmitted by the sign system of language which Derrida, like Nietzsche, considers to disguise a metaphysical and theological investment, since it 'inherently leaves open the possibility of thinking *a concept signified in and of itself*, a concept simply present for thought'.[11] Thus metaphysical and theological notions are inherent in the language of Western thought and need to be addressed with suspicion.

Nietzsche and Derrida taken together represent a formidable impediment to the proclamation of the gospel in a postmodern society. Their work has contributed towards the idea that any God talk is essentially obscurantist, and concerned with giving the impression that the church has access to hidden wisdom and mysteries which its ministries reveal to those who submit to its authority. It would follow that any renewal of gospel proclamation within a postmodern society might be interpreted as a disguised bid for power, influence, and privilege.

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[8] Ibid. p. 6.
[9] Ibid. p. 7.
[10] Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', in *Margins of Philosophy* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 228.
[11] Stephen D. Moore, *Post Structuralism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) p. 17.

2.2.1.3 ROLAND BARTHES

Another important thinker is Roland Barthes who looks for the manipulative power interests which underlie what he describes as the mythologies of the post-war (1945) years. In his essay on *Photography and Electoral Appeal* he unmasks the manipulative use of the photographic message.[12] The political candidate's picture which he describes is not a natural reproduction but a crafted image suggesting what amounts to a physical climate. By dress and posture he is saying; look at me, I am like you. The photograph aims to conceal his plans but to reveal his deep motives, his family, his style of life, his ideology. The voter becomes an object of research only so that she may be offered her own likeness. Far from being a reproduction of reality, the photograph conceals and reshapes the truth. It becomes a manipulative device, a tool of ambition .

Another popular image which is deployed as a manipulative device, is what he calls the good looking chap whose obvious credentials are his health and virility (not unlike the subliminal message of Billy Graham's poster campaign of 1954).[13] He draws attention to the three quarter face photograph which he calls ascensional with the face lifted towards the supernatural light of Olympus. For Barthes messages are designed to deceive and are not to be taken at face value. They are, in a postmodern world, concerned with power: taking messages at face value is unwise.

Barthes anticipates a second impediment to a renewal of Christian proclamation which makes the assumption that, like advertising, God talk hides more than it reveals. Proclamation, according to this view, conceals the true motives of the church which, whilst it offers comfort and hope to human insecurities and fears, it is in fact more concerned with regaining some of the influence which has been lost during the last fifty years, or simply swelling the ranks of Christian congregations and saving the church from extinction.

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[12] Roland Barthes,'Photography and Electoral Appeal', in *Mythologies* (Paris: Vintage, 1993), pp. 91-93

[13] Ibid. p. 92.

2.2.1.4 JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD

J. F. Lyotard recognizes, in his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* that the social bond, which binds humanity together, is linguistic; nevertheless he considers that it is not woven in a single thread, but by what he calls 'an interminable number of language games'.[14] We move between the various games adopting the languages and codes which are required to participate in a particular game at any given time. Because of the fragmented nature of human knowledge, he warns against the attempt to create a unified world view, seeing such a quest as the project of Enlightenment thinkers who sought in various ways to construct such a unity, and who in the process of nineteenth and twentieth century history have, 'inflicted as much terror as we can take'.[15] The price for nostalgia he claims has been too high and is inherently violent.

Lyotard draws attention to areas of suspicion which are residual in Western society; namely that the church has participated in coercive social control even to the point of promoting war. The memories of the Inquisition, the religious wars of seventeenth century Europe, and the links between missionary expansion and colonialism, are often recited in order to show that the church, for all its supposed good intentions, is not to be trusted. At another level, Lyotard's notion of the language game, in which no overarching world view is promoted against another, enables people to think of the church as merely a private society which exists to promote a moral aestheticism among its members, and to organize charitable activities. Clearly the postmodern climate of suspicion stops well short of welcoming any new initiatives in evangelization. Proclamation of the gospel as a public activity invites distrust in a culture which expects to be deceived at every turn.

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[14] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 40.
[15] Ibid. p. 81.

2.2.2 THE PLURALISM OF THE MARKETPLACE

In a postmodern society high profile messages which are designed to change attitudes and opinions are regarded with some suspicion. At the same time we have seen that exploring religious ideas and beliefs is still a feature of our society and this openness creates new opportunities to proclaim the gospel. Obviously any new initiative based upon a theology of the cross, which calls for a passionate surrender to God, will want to avoid giving the impression that proclamation is but a means to reestablish the influence of the church. Thought must be given to how a renewed proclamation should function within a postmodern society. We can say that notions of a crusade or campaign are likely to be interpreted with suspicion, as well as being as ineffective as T. C. E., the G.L.C., and the N.I.E.. Christian proclamation must again learn to function within the democratic market of religious needs and wants.

In the postmodern marketplace of religious pluralism a renewed evangelism must be able to stand on its own feet. The church must understand itself to be supported by God alone, making its appeal in his authority without patronage or privilege. In order to become truly modern the church must become postmodern in that it no longer lays claim to be the guardian of a public truth which undergirds society, defining its values, and providing its cohesion. In the marketplace of religious ideas, Christian truth is one idea among many, and is no longer perceived of as a privileged metanarrative against which abnormal or eccentric truths are measured; therapies and meditation techniques are as relevant as an orthodox Christian faith if the consumer considers them to be so. Graham Cray reminds us that, 'the culture of the nineties is pluralistic with regard to truth. Truth is understood as only having meaning or relevance as an expression of individual preference or corporately within communities of belief'.[16] For something to be true it only needs to be a functional or working truth. Pluralism has become an ideology in its own right, and the very existence of a market place of ideas and practices is in itself attractive to the postmodern imagination. Whilst it is perfectly correct to situate Christian

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[16] Graham Cray, *From Here to Where* ? (London: Board of Mission[n.d.]), Occasional Paper No 3. p. 10.

proclamation in the public arena, it is no longer regarded as *the* public truth, it is merely one among others.

The image of the church as one stall in a marketplace of ideas should not create fear or panic. Markets are notorious for selling new gadgets and trivia but there is also room for bric-a-brac and antiques. The world of religious needs and wants is open ended and fashions ebb and flow. The proclamation of the church must adjust to these new sensibilities and practices, and learn the skills of dialogue for which Christian proclamation now calls. If the Christian apologist is determined to operate at the level of religious needs and wants, rather than standing above it all, she will meet a variety of truth claims. Folk religion explores a do-it-yourself, or a pick and mix pastiche of theologies, whilst paganism, magic, occult practices, and New Age philosophies such as the Gaia theory have seized the imagination of thousands.[17] Clearly the Christian apologist must expect no invitation to sit at the top table of religious debate, the analogy of the market stall with its noisy negotiation is the arena from which new opportunities can open to the religious entrepreneur.

The church has been slow to recognize that the proclamation of the gospel needs to be recontextualized within a postmodern culture, but encouraging insights and good practice do exist. The work of the missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin and the New Church leader Dave Tomlinson enshrine many of the features of a renewed evangelism which we have considered to be important. It is worthwhile to look at their work and then to assess the potentiality of a proclamation informed by a theology of the cross. We will then be in a position in chapters three and four respectively, to consider the proclamation of the gospel, a) as an enriching experience of community, and b) as an encounter, in which the ephemeral self of

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[17] Michael Perry, *Gods Within* (London: S.P.C.K. 1992), p. 73. J. Lovelock F.R.S. first suggested that the entire range of living matter on earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts. W.Golding the Nobel laureate in literature suggested that this creature be called Gaia, after the Greek Earth goddess.

postmodernity is able to revision selfhood as the reappropriation of a narrative self with a restored sense of personal agency.

2.3 NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN A POSTMODERN CULTURE

2.3.1 BISHOP LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

Lesslie Newbigin has understood that in order to become effective the proclamation of the gospel must work within the prevailing culture. He has worked as a bishop in the church of South India, and more recently in his retirement, as a pastor of a small United Reformed Church in Winson Green, Birmingham. In his book *A Word In Season* he describes the ministry of the church in terms of a *sign*, an *instrument*, and a *firstfruit*. The church becomes a *sign*, 'pointing men to something that is beyond their present horizon but can give guidance and hope now'. As an *instrument* the church works to create conditions conducive to human liberation and the good of all. Whilst as a *firstfruit* [of the rule of God] the church becomes 'a place where men and women can have a real taste now of the joy and freedom God intends for us all'.[18] Newbigin sees that the church exists to point to Christ and to become an expression of his compassion which becomes tangible within the worship and life of the Christian community.

Newbigin's description of the care ministries of his churches in Madras, India is an excellent example of the poured out life of Christ the man for others. Not only does their worship celebrate the anticipated joys of the coming rule of God, not only does their preaching point to Christ as Saviour and Lord, but as an instrument of the kingdom they move to meet human need as they are best able. Teams are formed to cover all the city's slums and bring swift relief in fire or flood. A major scheme is launched to provide clean water, and a sewerage system is planned which motivates the city authorities to become involved. Church buildings are made available for students needing light and space for study at night, and for shelter for those who have

[18] Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1994), p. 33.

suffered the loss of their homes.[19] The ministries of care and compassion which Newbigin describes are not regarded as ends in themselves, nor are they manipulative devices to gain converts to the faith. Rather they are expressions of the compassion of Christ which requires the church to make a costly surrender to God, his kingdom, and the community for which Christ died.

If Madras seems far removed from a postmodern culture, Newbigin found that in his subsequent pastorate, in inner city, multi-racial Winson Green in Birmingham, similar principles applied. Whilst many orthodox Christians existed among the Afro-Caribbean community, he was faced with Anglo Saxon natives who had abandoned the Christian faith as 'an old fairy tale'.[20] The area had also become home for many other non-Christian religions such as Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. On the one hand he found a deep apathy to religion in general, and on the other a variety of living faiths and theologies in close proximity. Winson Green was, a first order pluralistic community situated in the religious market place of human needs and wants, with few people caring whether the local church survived or not. In this new situation Newbigin found that the principles which governed his work in India were still relevant in Birmingham.

Newbigin claims that 'what the gospel offers is not just hope for the individual but hope for the world', and therefore the congregation must be deeply involved in the secular concerns of the whole neighbourhood.[21] Every local issue must be drawn into the rule of God because every part of human life falls within the range of the gospel message. He states that,

> there is no other place in human history where the ultimate issues of man's life - his interior personal life and his public political and social life - are finally exposed and settled, except in the living and dying and rising again of Jesus Christ. There is no other in all the human story who could possibly be the King and Head of the human race.[22]

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[19] Ibid. pp. 35-36
[20] Ibid. pp. 41-42.
[21] Ibid. p. 43.
[22] Ibid. p. 38.

It follows that if the good news is to be authentically communicated it must be clear that the church is concerned about the rule of God and not about itself.

Whilst recognizing that the church is but one voice amongst others, Newbigin discusses and resists the suggestion that working in Winson Green requires proclamation to be interpreted as evangelism when addressed to Anglo Saxons, but as inter -faith dialogue when addressed to those of other faiths. Good news reserved for Anglo Saxons alone he considers to verge on racism. Newbigin sees that the distinction is made because evangelism has been understood as proselytism, as a manipulation of those unable to resist, which he condemns. Nevertheless he asserts,

> a believing, celebrating, loving Christian fellowship, fully involved in the life of the wider community and sharing its burdens and sorrows, cannot withhold from others the secret of its hope, and certainly cannot commit the monstrous absurdity of supposing that the hope it lives by applies only to those of a particular ethnic origin.[23]

Because the hope of the church is to be proclaimed to the whole humanity Newbigin has resituated the gospel in a marketplace where his small church has no status or influence. As a *sign* the church proclaims the gospel in the diversity of the pluralistic marketplace of human wants and needs: it bears witness to the reconciling love of God to which all humanity is called to respond. As an *instrument* words and ideas translate into a culture of service, so that the self giving which we have associated with the cross of Christ can be seen everywhere. As a *firstfruit* [of the rule of God] the church celebrates the victory of the cross, and, in the gathered community of faith, anticipates the eternal joys of the kingdom.

Newbigin felt that in Winson Green significant numerical growth was a distant hope but was content to leave such matters with God. In South India numerical growth was taken for granted but Newbigin saw that it must not become his overriding concern in Winson Green. He was more concerned that the church should be a servant community, bearing witness to the rule of God and the salvation which is in Christ. He therefore resisted any notion that evangelization should translate into inter-

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[23] Ibid. p. 46.

faith dialogue which tacitly acknowledges that all religions serve the same purpose, and possess the same value. Whilst he accepted that the culture of his parish was pluralistic, and would not attempt to proclaim Christ by issuing a recall to the church, nevertheless he was fully committed to showing that Christ alone is the Saviour of all. Motivated by the self giving of Christ he was happy to verbally proclaim the gospel, arguing, discussing, and explaining his insights, and disavowing any kind of manipulative strategy.

2.3.2 DAVE TOMLINSON

Unlike Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, Dave Tomlinson, who has functioned as a leader within the New Church movement, sees himself as an innovative evangelist and church planter. He is now pastor of a church which meets in a South London pub known as Holy Joe's which is as unlike a conventional church as one can imagine. Smoking and drinking are allowed in a relaxed pub atmosphere. Worship evenings (Tuesdays), may involve the use of candles, ambient music, and lots of symbols, and people participate as little or as much as they wish.[24] The notion of a church in a working pub makes it difficult to think of evangelism as a recall to the church, and also sustains an atmosphere of a friendly supportive community in which vigorous debate and argument can take place, and where the church is situated within a marketplace of ideas. Tomlinson is determined to avoid manipulative devices and to be increasingly open to new expressions of proclamation.

He sees the emergence of a postmodern culture as providing new opportunities for experimentation, defining himself as a post evangelical, and as such influenced by the culture of postmodernity. Tomlinson writes, 'this is the cultural environment which influences the way they [post evangelicals] think about and experience their faith'.[25] At Holy Joe's there is no dependency culture or an implicit paternalism: no unrealistic promises are made to allure potential converts, and unbelief is not overwhelmed by the force of argument. Tomlinson functions as an

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[24] Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995), p. 13.
[25] Ibid. p. 9.

empowering front man, inviting questions and suggesting areas of inquiry for tentative inquirers. He is clearly evangelistic in his endeavours and aims to make new disciples, but recognizes that new pathways to faith may be discovered in a community in which suspicion is not a prominent feature.

Tomlinson's pastoral and evangelical approach are well illustrated by his reference to Walter Brueggemann's *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*.[26] He urges that Christian preachers should not describe the Christian life as a fully alternative world as most evangelists tend to do, but rather to fund the postmodern imagination i.e to provide pieces, materials , and resources out of which a new world can be imagined. Tomlinson's Holy Joe's pub church is not a tell it to them straight proclamation without a choir or hymn book, but a genuine attempt to offer an experience of self discovery in the context of developing faith. As a post evangelical, in a postmodern culture, he seems to be aware that Lyotard's deconstruction of the metanarrative model calls for the creation of language games, in which the Bible functions, not as a source of authoritative information, but as a resource from which a picture might be built. Tomlinson is aware of the risks of understatement but sees greater danger in becoming stuck in a rigid framework of certainty. Certainty, finality, and absolutes are concepts unvalued by post evangelicals like Tomlinson, who is well pleased to create a process of inquiry rather than a crisis of conversion on the Billy Graham model.

The pub environment is regarded as a secure place in which unchurched people can confidently share their ideas, and where if anyone is out of place, it is more likely to be the evangelist. In this environment faith can be questioned, discussed, and criticized without embarrassment. Tomlinson seems to recognize that faith needs to be rooted in a supportive communality which is more than just a gathering of like minded individuals. He offers an atmosphere in which worship and inquiry initiate a creative process of sharing ideas, opinions, and good news. Tomlinson has consented to become the powerless apostle with no denominational

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[26] Ibid. pp. 82-83.

backing, no license to practice, and no institutional credentials to offer. He has set up his stall in the marketplace of human wants and desires and has found that his approach has led to a brisk trade. He has developed new pathways to Christ and exists, not to preach for a result but, to function as a guide and facilitator. He answers questions, explains concepts, witnesses to his own faith, and acts as a midwife to emerging faith.

Tomlinson has no problem with the idea that the church must become a postmodern church; indeed he positively celebrates the idea as a liberation from the formalities of traditional structures. By choosing to resituate the church in a pub he has willingly allowed structures to be dictated by others but has successfully initiated a dialogue between an orthodox Christian faith and the community at large. His alternative way of doing church picks up lots of passing trade and enables the gospel to be restated in new ways. Tomlinson appears to avoid any kind of manipulative strategy; his appeal is directed towards the displaced religious consciousness, which as we have seen, is widespread in British society. For Tomlinson the way of the cross has meant leaving the leadership circles of the New Churches in which he was held in high esteem, and taking the good news into the marketplace where he has no reputation or status.

2.4 POTENTIALITY OF THE MODEL

Lesslie Newbigin's proclamation of Christ in the context of the religious pluralism of Winson Green; and Dave Tomlinson's attempts to make the gospel accessible to the pub culture of south London, call for a passionate act of self denial which aims primarily to liberate those who are addressed. Proclamation, reenergized by a theology of the cross, can become effective in a postmodern culture of suspicion. The essential features of a renewed proclamation call for the church to understand itself as a servant church, which will involve it in costly self giving, analogous to the sacrificial self offering of Christ. It will also require the conscious disavowing of any strategy which might be construed as a manipulative device and which serves the self interest of the church rather than those of the recipient.

2.4.1 THE LOCAL CHURCH

Proclamation shaped by a theology of the cross is able to adequately address recently felt anxieties which we have associated with the postmodern condition. The local church, as we shall see in chapter three, can become available to its neighbourhood in new and innovative ways, and is still uniquely well placed to offer a quality of care and community to those who feel that their lives have become unmanageable in a postmodern culture. The loss of narrative, cohesion, and referentiality are not necessarily permanent conditions. The familiar flower festival, the mother and toddlers meeting, the stall at the village fête, the community newspaper dealing with local issues; all can consciously aim to develop the local church as a friendship centre within a given community; effectively relocating evangelization within a culture of care and service. If, without violating human independence, such friendship can also point beyond the local church to the rule of God, it becomes apparent that the church is not preoccupied with its own survival but with the concerns of the kingdom, and the well-being of its neighbourhood. By developing proclamation as an extension of the sacrificial self giving of the cross, the local church is potentially able to carry the good news into every secular event within its community.

PART II

THE POSTMODERN EXPERIENCE OF GOOD NEWS

CHAPTER 3.

THE GOSPEL AS AN EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

3.1 THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY

I maintain that the local church can effectively proclaim the gospel within a postmodern society. Empowered by a theology of the cross, Christian proclamation can lead to the creation of new disciples and new numerical church growth. The failure of T. C. E. and the G. L. C. to effectively recall the English people to a renewal of faith indicates that evangelism in itself is no solution to the problem of numerical decline. I have however claimed, that the evangelism of the church can be renewed: in this chapter I will consider an approach to proclamation which is contextualized within an enriching experience of community, and which can be experienced as the good news of the gospel at a local church level.

3.1.1 THE SOCIOLOGICAL MEANING OF COMMUNITY

We need to ask, what do we mean by community, and how does it become enriching? The sociologist David Clark in his *The Liberation of the Church* has shown that the sociological definition of community has evolved over a period of 150 years and involves five clear insights which are complementary.[1] The earliest definitions related to *a loose knit collection of human beings*, and to the common people, without reference to sex, age, or class. Secondly, community was associated with an identifiable territory, especially to the village; but after World War II it was extended to well definable city locations. Thirdly, it became linked with the activities of groups sharing common interests or activities, such as office workers, or members of a

[1] David Clark, *The Liberation of the Church* (Birmingham: The National Centre for Christian Communities and Networks, Westhill College, 1984), pp. 13-15.

college who might live many miles apart. Communities thus became a place where people gathered for a clearly identifiable purpose. Fourthly, and closely associated with the last definition, it became associated with certain types of social relationships which Clark defines as primary groups where people encounter each other on a face-to-face basis. This might include family groups, or even temporary encounters, e.g. friends made on holiday. Finally, beyond the notions of human collectives or certain kinds of locality, or even closely knit groups, sociologists have extended the idea to include 'how participants *feel,* about themselves and others, in relation to the group of which they are members'. [2] In Clark's opinion community now depends on two key feelings, 'a *sense of significance* or personal fulfillment, and a *sense of solidarity* or belonging'.[3] In a postmodern society community is best understood in terms of a quality of relationships in which people feel valued and legitimated.

3.1.2 THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF COMMUNITY

We have seen that the birth of the Christian community is related to the Christian messenger consenting to participate in the sufferings of Christ, which amounts to a passionate surrender to God and his kingdom. Jürgen Moltmann further shows that Christ's passion is shared by God himself, who consents to enter the suffering of his creation to show that: *God is with us, God is for us*, and that *we come from God.*[4]

To say that *God is with us* implies that he is with us in time and space, in a place. The parish church at the centre of the village community, once unambiguously signified the presence of God. The spire pointed to heavenly mysteries and the bells beckoned the community to return again to the church from which the mysteries were dispensed. For the majority of people the church building no longer fulfils this function, but the very notion that God is with us implies that we are relationally linked with other people who also feel his presence. To say that *God is for us* implies that he acts on our behalf, he takes initiatives which become intelligible to us

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[2] Ibid. p. 15.
[3] Ibid. p. 15.
[4] Jürgen Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, (S.C.M. 1990) pp. 180-1.

against the background of our particular circumstances and location. In Christ, God moves to save us, bringing us into his redeemed community. To say that via the sufferings of God we are deemed to *come from God,* implies that the eschatological horizon has broken in upon our limited vision. The idea of being part of a new creation, which has yet to fully appear, can only be grasped from the point of view of a particular community, the church.

We have seen that a postmodern society can not easily relate to the idea of the institutional church functioning as the guardians of the nation's sacred traditions. In a postmodern world, truth is regarded, not as a metadiscourse, but as the insights of individuals and small groups. The community through which we come to see that God is *with us, for us,* and the source of our life, must be experienced beyond community understood simply as a sacred place. Community needs to become a place of intimacy where people encounter each other within relationships of friendships and commitments. More important still, it needs to engender a quality of feeling which bestows both a sense of significance and solidarity upon those who are drawn into its sphere of influence. The church in a postmodern society must become an experience of community which disclosed that *God is with us, God is for us,* and that *we come from God.*

3.1.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

The church which wants to proclaim the gospel to its neighbourhood will find that a verbal proclamation alone, whilst indispensable, is inadequate. The mobility of the population, and their willingness to shop around for spiritual, as well as recreational gratification, places the church in the marketplace of religious pluralism. The church must become a community, which, like a shopping mall, entices people to come in and take a look at what is on offer. Having thoroughly scrutinized its neighbourhood, the church must develop ministries which aim to meet the varied needs of its community, with special attention paid to regular quality events which are entertaining, attractive, and which bring the local church and the neighbourhood together. In this context friendships and relationships can develop which enable faith

sharing to take place. It is in this context that the church can become a community through which people feel legitimized and valued. In order to disclose that *God is with us*, *God is for us*, and that *we come from God*, the church must create new, imaginative, and multiple points of contact with its neighbours. In the context of entertainment, recreation, and involvement in the concerns of the locality, the church can become a community which values and legitimizes its neighbourhood, engendering a quality of feeling which bestows a sense of significance and solidarity upon those who are drawn into its sphere of influence.

The good news of the gospel, that God loves us, that Christ has died for our sins, that his death has absorbed our evil and opens the kingdom of God to us, is intimately related to being in the church, the community of Christ. The quality of this community is, as David Clark reminds us, not just related to observable facts, but to '*altruistic values* as well as facts; about a richness of life, about a purpose for living, and about a power to make it all possible'.[5] Proclaiming good news in the 1990s requires that it becomes enfleshed in an enriching experience of community in which the hearer feels uniquely legitimized and valued.

3.2 THE COMMUNITY OF JESUS

The writers of the four gospels portray Jesus as the founder and leader of a community which provided its members with a profound sense of significance and solidarity. He is associated with a proclamation of good news about the kingdom of God, which, in his ministry, became accessible to all who responded to his message, Mk. 1: 14-15. He called twelve others to be with him, Mk.3:13-18, to whom he transmitted his teaching; they abandoned their careers, shared a common life, and accompanied him on his preaching/healing tours. At a later stage Jesus sent the twelve on a preaching mission in which he himself did not participate, and which seems to have possessed the hallmarks of an advanced stage of their training i.e. working independently of their teacher but transmitting his message, Lk. 9:1-6. They, like him, were to proclaim the

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[5] David Clark, *The Liberation of the Church* (Birmingham: The National Centre for Christian Communications and Networks, Westhill College, 1984), p. 16.

good news of the kingdom of God and engage in the liberating ministries of exorcism and healing which characterized the ministry of Jesus. As the number of adherents grew Jesus was able to send out seventy preachers to spread his message, Lk. 10:1-12. In the light of the nearness of the kingdom, Jesus is portrayed as needing more workers in order to call others to the rule of God which could be experienced by developing links with his community.

Shortly after the death of Jesus Luke reported that about 120 of the community met and elected Matthias who, replacing Judas, was elected to make up the community leadership to its original twelve members, Acts1.15-26. Clearly the New Testament writers portray the community associated with Jesus as continuing to exist after his death and working to pass on his teaching. It was a community which expected God to continue to act through them; and which nurtured a mutuality of love and care. The community of Jesus had a quality of inclusiveness. Jesus himself debated theology with women, drew a tax gatherer into his inner circle, illustrated the principle of love for one's neighbour by citing the action of a good Samaritan; favoured the prayers of an outcast tax collector over those of a Pharisee, and, in spite of the commonly held idea that poverty was an evidence of God's displeasure and wealth a sign of his blessing, he represents the beggar Lazarus as received into Abraham's bosom at his death, whilst the rich man lay in torment, Lk. 16:19-31.

As a preacher/teacher Jesus announced that the reign of God was a present reality, and his ministries on behalf of needy and marginalized people were an expression of this momentous event. His ministries of teaching, healing, and exorcism, were but different aspects of his disclosing of the kingdom rule of God, Lk. 4:18-19. A more puzzling feature was that the kingdom, although present, was in some sense still to come, Mt. 6:10, and would in that coming subsume the world and its affairs into a larger perspective. The community of Jesus was eschatological in that it understood itself to be standing between the present, and the horizon yet to be disclosed, when the full salvation of God would be revealed. The church therefore understands itself to be living in this creative tension, between the times, which enables it to anticipate a destiny beyond the flux of human events.

The community of Jesus was a good news community in that the salvific work of God could be understood and experienced within the context of the message and actions of Jesus and his close associates. It had a quality which revealed that God was potentially present to all those who came within its sphere of influence. The community existed, not in order to gratify the needs and aspirations of Jesus or his close supporters, who sacrificially gave themselves to the service of others, but rather it existed in order to meet the needs of those who were on the outside, but who might draw near and come to see that God was acting on their behalf. Encountering the community of Jesus could mean that the extremities of human need were met, but also that his followers were becoming equipped to participate in a new age which was coming into being and experienced through that community. The community of Jesus revealed that God was *with* those who encountered it. He acted *for* those who responded to its message, bestowing a new sense of identity upon them; henceforth they would know that they *came from God.* The good news which Jesus and his followers proclaimed, bestowed a deep sense of significance upon the hearers. It called for a response which drew people into a matrix of relationships in which they came to feel legitimated and fulfilled.

If the contemporary church is understood as an extension of the community of Jesus, then any encounter with it can potentially become an enriching experience, in which people from many backgrounds and circumstances are valued and legitimated, and in which the rule of God is experienced. The preaching of the gospel has often been divorced from this context, as in the case of the G. L. C., where overemphasis upon a verbal proclamation, at the expense of an encounter with the Christian community, led to an ineffective evangelization. This is not to claim that Christian community amounts simply to the idea that life together is better than isolated individualism. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon claim that in the church we are living out a story which,

> just happens to be *true*. The church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Only on the

basis of his story, which reveals to us who we are and what has happened in the world, is true community possible.[6]

3.3 THE EROSION OF COMMUNITY

In a postmodern culture traditional notions of community have been eroded. In pre-modernity and modernity alike, work, family, and religion, have been self defining institutions. Under the conditions of pre-modernity skills were transmitted within families and intermarriage was common among groups which practiced the same trade and religion. Whilst this practice was weakened under the conditions of modernity, work, family, and religion, still enabled people to make sense of their lives and to feel fulfilled and valued in their societies. In this context religion could function as an overall context in which life became intelligible.

In a postmodern society the institutions of work and family have been eroded. The world of work is now an area of great insecurity for the skilled and unskilled, for the artisan and professional alike. Skills which only yesterday were highly valued are today quickly regarded as obsolete and useless; whilst jobs, and sometimes whole industries, can become reclassified as unprofitable and dispensable. The world in which we work has become less than solid, having lost it's apparent unity and continuity. Time is experienced as episodes; each with a beginning and an end, but without a prehistory or a future, or even a logical link between the episodes. This insecurity, combined with the loss of an interpretive structure, can work against long term commitment within the family and community, thereby creating a crisis of identity, and an incoherence, in which the narrative structure of life is shattered. Zygmunt Bauman states that 'the world we live in (and helped to bring about through our life pursuits) appears to be marked by *fragmentation, discontinuity,* and *inconsequentiality.*'[7] It follows that any interpretation of life, understood as an extended narrative, will be confronted by the life experienced as fragmented and

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[6] Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 77.
[7] Zygmunt Bauman, *Alone Again* (London: Demos, 1994), p. 16.

episodic. In a postmodern culture, leisure, family, and work, are often quite distinct and unrelated activities without any unifying structure.

In a postmodern society, any proclamation of the gospel which assumes that life is intelligible as a metanarrative has little hope of effectively communicating the good news of the kingdom. The erosion of community experienced within postmodernity has given rise to a rampant individualism, in which religion in general can be understood as a leisure pursuit of those seeking spiritual answers, or as the means of realizing particular ethical insights. It is therefore the more urgent that good news should be proclaimed as an enriching experience of community in which God is encountered as an experience of liberation and fulfillment. Diogenes Allen claims that 'with God's help and guidance, we are to strive for a proper community life in which we may begin to find our well-being.'[8]

3.3.1 COMMUNITY AS AN EXPERIENCE OF INTIMACY

Within a postmodern culture, community is increasingly experienced as an association with a variety of groups, societies, and clubs, committed to various leisure pursuits in which the individual is validated and fulfilled. Their activities may range from a football club to a music society, or even a small group of enthusiasts who restore classic cars etc. The significant features of these communities is that they are narrow areas of human concern which provide emotional nourishment and a sense of solidarity for those who become involved in their activities. As with the graffiti artists which we have noted, or a football club, their scope may have a global or international dimension, though only in terms of their narrow area of interest. The community which nurtures and sustains the individual at this emotional level becomes, what David Clark describes as, a primary group in which close bonding takes place and specific values are realized. The community becomes a good news community because the realization of specific values have become indistinguishable from participating in its activities.

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[8] Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 123.

The local church, as we have seen, can enter this marketplace of movements and societies, and, as an ongoing expression of the community of Jesus, can work to reveal the eschatological horizon whilst engaging in ministries of liberation. It can become a society in which fringe associates begin to feel the presence of God within the context of newly made friendships, and where issues of ultimate concern are explored. The church as a community can become a good news community in which people feel legitimated and valued. In order to be a good news community the church must consent to work within the structures of a postmodern society, which, I maintain, involves the abandonment of large scale national evangelistic initiatives which have produced little numerical growth over the last half century.

The local church can proclaim the gospel as one society amongst others: it can verbally proclaim that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and argue its case at every opportunity without in any way attempting to silence other voices. The church can say, 'this is the way we have come to understand reality, why not stand here with us and see if you can not see things the way we do?' In this dialogical encounter with our culture, the church can, as we shall see, reflect the costly surrender of Jesus and move to meet the spiritual, emotional, and material, needs of its neighbours. The local church, which understands its ministry within this context can experience a renewal of numerical growth, but only as it looks to the needs of its neighbourhood rather than its own needs. The good news of the kingdom can be heard and appropriated as an enriching experience of community, in which people come to feel that they have made contact with an ultimate reality. The postmodern imagination can, as Dave Tomlinson has claimed, be supplied with insights which enable it to imagine a new future for itself beyond the uncertainties of life. The church can thus become an area of intimacy in which discoveries are made which nurture the emotional life and enabling the postmodern imagination to feel the love of God.

3.4 THE CHURCH AS THE COMMUNITY OF JESUS

In order to become a good news community the church must come to understand itself as a postmodern church. Its proclamation is set against the background of numerical

decline and faltering institutions, which often create feelings of powerlessness leading to anxiety regarding its own future. In a postmodern society its status has been reduced; it can no longer present itself as the guardian of the nation's sacred traditions. It exists in the market place of human needs and wants only by virtue of its ability to meet felt needs. Clearly there can be no turning the clock back to any notion of the good old days, when the church had an acknowledged and privileged role in the life of the nation. The future of the church lies not in confronting or exposing the weaknesses of postmodern culture, but in taking its hope into the new cultural configurations which we have noted. In this process it must faithfully report the grounds of its hope, and resist all temptation to live for itself by arranging its own security in times of numerical decline and uncertainty.

3.4.1 REPORTING HOPE

The church, as we have seen, can not be the church of Christ without being committed to proclaiming the gospel: the church is a missionary community. The story of the church concerns the salvation of God, which Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has secured for all humanity. To proclaim Christ involves reporting the nature and context of his sacrifice against the background of human need, calling people to put their trust in him; and inviting them to participate in the life and worship of his community. Participation in the community of Jesus reveals our deepest spiritual needs and shows us who we are. Only as we consent to identify ourselves with the community called into existence by God, do we feel that *God is with us.* The idea of God becomes a presence which comforts in sorrow, strengthens in weakness, and creates moral and spiritual energy. The community of Jesus helps us to see that *God is for us,* an insight which creates a new context for living and which encourages prayer, meditation, and a willingness to anticipate his guidance. Again, the community of Jesus reveals to us that *we come from God* as a new creation, an insight which enables us to understand life as purposeful and worthwhile. Clearly the proclamation of the gospel has far reaching and life transforming potential. It is 'a story of the peculiar

way God is redeeming the world, a story that invites us to come forth and be saved by sharing in the work of a new people whom God has created in Israel and Jesus'.[9]

3.4.2 THE ABANDONMENT OF SECURITY

To be linked with Jesus is to be linked with his community. As we have seen, that community has an eschatological quality, it is the intersection of two worlds, the fallen, broken, divided world and the world that is to come. When this eschatological emphasis is lost the church community becomes a society of friends or a gathering of like-minded people. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin in his *A Word in Season* asks the elders of a church in Madras what function the church performs ? They replied, 'it caters to the needs of its members', to which Newbigin replies, 'then it should be disbanded'.[10]

The church community which has lost sight of the eschatological horizon from which the salvation of God is finally disclosed can not help but live for itself and its membership. The loss of urgency to report the good news, and to actively seek to draw mankind into its horizon of understanding, will inevitably translate into anxiety concerning numerical decline, and even into manipulative evangelism in order to preserve the church. It is difficult to imagine the church which exists for the benefit of its members pouring out its life to its community in sacrificial care ministries, or, so ordering its activities, or deploying its resources, so that its life as a community points beyond itself. The church which sees its primary task as catering for the needs for its membership can never become a church which makes a passionate and costly surrender to God and humanity, and can never become the embodiment of a cross centred proclamation: it easily becomes the community around which the world revolves, so scorned by Friedrich Nietzsche. Newbigin's harsh judgment may not be as unreasonable as it sounds.

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[9] Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 52.
[10] Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1994), p. 34.

3.5 NAZARETH BAPTIST CHURCH 1981-1990

I have claimed that within a postmodern society effective evangelization must be developed within an enriching experience of community life. We have seen that reformed notions of community have arisen in terms of narrowly focused interest groups which both legitimate and entertain their members. In a postmodern society, community, like religion, is situated in a democratic provider receiver market, and functions to meet the needs and aspirations of narrowly focused primary groups within which people feel validated. It would appear that the gospel, expressed as a verbal proclamation alone, is unlikely to make a significant impact upon our culture, and that in order to do so it must be experienced within a web of close relationships, which have the capacity to open the heart and mind to the presence of God. I will now show that a renewal of evangelization can be achieved in the above terms by referring to my work as minister of Nazareth Baptist Church, situated in the town of Mountain Ash in the Cynon valley of South Wales.

My work in the valleys from 1981-1990 was a period of rapid de-industrialization in the principality, it was also a period in which my declining and elderly congregation reformed its understanding of evangelism, and witnessed a new period of spiritual and numerical growth. This was a period of great uprooting within the homogeneous mining communities of South Wales. As mines closed and redundancies multiplied a collective trauma was experienced throughout the valley communities. The miners strike of 1984, in particular, had a devastating effect upon the community at large.

The global economy was making its logic felt in a remote region of Britain; world markets were destroying traditional communities and many breadwinners concluded that they would never work again; a conclusion which led to anger, fear, and anxiety, as a collective emotion. This perception led to new forms of alienation within the community. Litter seemed to be more obvious, drunkenness and drug abuse increased, as did burglaries and violence within families. The new questions were, what does it mean to be without a regular income in a world which regards consumerism as a virtue ? How is it possible to value a miner, surveyor, electrician,

linesman, fitter, store keeper, or driver; when the project to which a life had been given is suddenly regarded as worthless ? Life seemed to be characterized by hopelessness and a new sense of powerlessness. Power had moved from the unions to world markets and whole communities experienced a profound sense of incoherence. The narrative self had suffered a traumatic disruption and new destructive forces were unleashed within families as mortgage holding became an intolerable burden.

3.5.1 PROCLAMATION AS AN EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

The church had an active membership of about fifty elderly people in 1981 which by 1990 grew to about one hundred and ten, most of whom ranged from teen-agers to middle age. A new strategy for pastoral care and evangelism was developed by a newly elected mission planning team, which determined that the church must find new opportunities to clearly proclaim the gospel against the new background of deep insecurity. It was recognized that this would be a costly exercise, and that it would involve the church ministry moving beyond concerns for its own elderly and declining membership. New opportunities had to be developed which enabled the church to devote time to listening to, and empathizing with, its community. Counselling services were established for young people who were experimenting with drug taking, and the church committed itself to meeting specific and immediate material and emotional needs as it was able. At least one quality social event was held monthly (see fig. 1), which created a focus for the renewal of community amongst people who had experienced a profound social and economic disruption. In addition a clear commitment remained to sharing the good news of the gospel in words and actions whilst disavowing any manipulative strategy or intent.

The neighbourhood around the church consisted of people who, in one way or another, were, or had been, linked to the mining industry; and who were experiencing not only an economic crisis, but also a deep identity crisis. People understood themselves to be the powerless victims of faceless bureaucracies which had in a moment reduced them to poverty, and threatened the very existence of their community. In addition to developing a monthly quality event at which some level of

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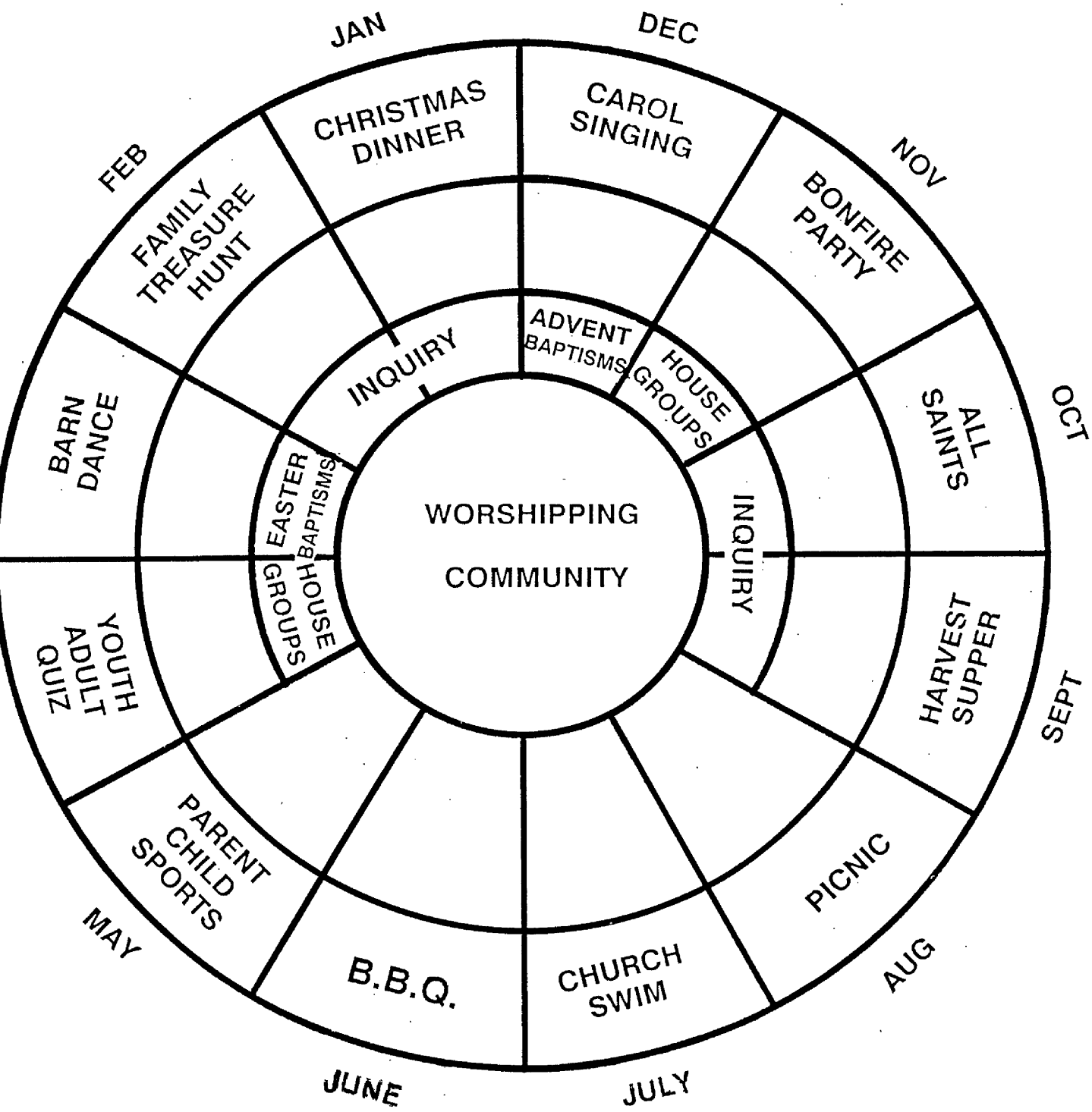
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ALL SAINTS
HARVEST SUPPER
PICNIC
CHURCH SWIM
B.B.Q.
PARENT CHILD SPORTS
YOUTH ADULT QUIZ
BARN DANCE
FAMILY TREASURE HUNT
INQUIRY
ADVENT BAPTISMS
HOUSE GROUPS
INQUIRY
EASTER BAPTISMS
HOUSE GROUPS
WORSHIPPING
COMMUNITY

verbal proclamation might be made, the church decided to develop: a) a new youth club, b) a parents' and toddlers' group cum church coffee morning, and c) re-launch Sunday School teacher training with a view to deepening teacher/family relationships. The new emphasis was upon creating quality relationships in which a traumatized community could regain a sense of direction in their lives. Whilst the church longed to share its faith with its neighbours, it recognized that words alone could not express the Christian hope. The church increasingly came to understand itself as a community in which the presence of God could be experienced as people came to feel legitimated beyond their insecure jobs and the new pressures of family life.

3.5.1.1 YOUTH CLUB

The youth club soon filled with youngsters from their mid to late teen years who were also experiencing the collective trauma of the community. The town discos' had become centres of drug abuse and a number of our new young people were experimenting with drugs. Drug abuse counselling was made available through the South Wales Association for the Prevention of Addiction, and a new round of social activities were developed by the church to simply create an alternative social life to the disco scene. The church organized camping trips, hikes, parachute jumps, and holidays, which created friendships, between teen-agers and middle age adults, which had not existed for many years. Our new ministries of care and leisure had a transforming effect upon our traditional institutions, not least within the new youth club. The traditional club epilogue was a five minute event during which some aspect of Christianity was discussed, and which the youngsters normally avoided. Eventually, as they got over the initial embarrassment of engaging in God Talk, they became long searching debates which often continued well after midnight. A new Christian Union was started in the local technical college and two struggling causes were revitalized in local secondary schools as our new young people began attending. A new evangelization was taking place in which a recreation of community life was making the good news about Jesus intelligible to teen-age youngsters.

3.5.1.2 PARENTS AND TODDLERS

The combined parents and toddlers/coffee morning group ensured that church members met our new fringe associates, who, because of the miners strike, attended as families. As they broke under the strain of redundancies and the ensuing debt, wives who came to our parents' group often arrived deeply distressed. We supplied food and clothing; but our women also sensitively prayed with them, and this activity became a permanent feature of our parents' group. A significant number of women who had been divorced, and attended our monthly leisure events as a group, came to parents and toddlers and asked searching questions regarding faith. Their stories were remarkably similar. They had attended Sunday School until their early teens, married in their late teens or early twenties, and divorced in their mid to late twenties. Their friendships were based upon the mutual support which they gave to each other and upon a shared sense of having failed in their marriages. The support and practical help given by the church soon established them as enthusiastic and regular adherents, who soon found that their social lives revolved around the church, to which they gradually brought friends and extended family. The friendships and kindness which they associated with their Sunday School days were rediscovered in parents and toddlers. Women in their mid to late thirties were recycling their childhood memories of faith and experiencing a profound sense of homecoming.

3.5.1.3 SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday School filled up with children from the parent's group who had been influenced by their new friends from the coffee morning, and who regarded Sunday School as simply an extension of their parent's group. The parents actually joined the classes and were obviously enjoying receiving a systematic Christian education for the first time, or picking up where they had left off twenty years earlier. The Christian story was being transmitted to people who would not normally have searched for life's answers in the church. The mothers were clearly appreciating the classes and so we responded by developing an all-age teaching session for about ten minutes which involved toddlers, teens, and adults, and which fostered a new sense of family

solidarity. We were amazed that this level of proclamation was being so well received, but after about three months mothers were encouraged to move from the Sunday School into the main morning service which operated at the same time. The Sunday school staff, with the help of the mission team, well understood the need for a rapid and flexible response to this new opportunity.

Verbal proclamation alone could not gain a new hearing for the gospel but the recreation of community in which people were legitimized, and where human needs were met, created new possibilities to proclaim the gospel to the neighbourhood. The community at large was experiencing a profound sense of incoherence and fragmentation, and the loss of spending power effectively re-classified them as non-participants in a consumer led society. In a culture characterized by numerical decline in the churches it became possible to show that God was present and active in new ways, and that therefore the future was open to new possibilities.

The local church, working within a postmodern society, must scrutinize its neighbourhood and attempt to create conditions in which the church moves to meet human needs in whatever way it can. The church is well placed to develop community events which, like the community of Jesus is able, by means of sacrificial service, to meet and legitimate a wide range of people. From the perspective of a community which has an overriding concern to share its faith, fringe associates can be enabled to imagine an alternative world, in which God is in some way present to them, and working on their behalf. Within the context of entertainments and social activities, proclamation can function as a face to face encounter, in which a new self can be imagined.

3.5.2 THE GOSPEL AS COMMUNITY

The revival meetings which took place in the South Wales Valleys from 1904-06 resulted in the building of many churches which are today poorly attended and dilapidated. Many congregations hover on the verge of extinction and are preoccupied with the idea of saving the church, an attitude which can easily lead to proselytization and manipulative evangelization. Nazareth church, through the convulsions within its

neighbourhood, came to see that it must cease to be anxious about its own future and, as an expression of the community of Jesus, move to meet the needs of its neighbours. The church had memories of seating a thousand people in its heyday but recognized that it must abandon any ambition to reclaim the influence it once possessed. A new imaginative building scheme produced new kitchens, play areas, lounges, and conference rooms which facilitated the new activities which the church was developing. The church came to terms with the fact that its status within the community had become greatly reduced, and began to encounter its neighbourhood in a series of events which had the character of entertainments and spectacles but within which faith could be shared.

Within the community at large the church was experienced in a new way; it became a centre of community life in which many groups could comfortably participate, whilst at the same time never losing its character as the community of Jesus which had a message to share. Its new activities enabled it to meet people who were struggling to keep their families together, and who were afflicted with a sense of failure, fear, and inadequacy. The good news of the gospel was shared in a web of new personal relationships and friendships, which had a liberating quality, quite unlike the proclamation of the G. L. C. which could not sustain its message within an enriching experience of community. In Nazareth church the proclamation of Christ was experienced as an encounter with his people who understood themselves to be an extension of his community. It was embodied and enfleshed in relationships and events which legitimized and valued the hearers.

Because the gospel had become an experience of community, it came as no surprise that people had began to confess Christ as Saviour and Lord in groups. Young women, teenagers, and older people, discussed the idea in their groups and came to ask for baptism or inquirers classes (see fig.1).[11] The idea of salvation developed a communal and collective character which the church had never met before. For many new converts it was not so much an individual and personal decision, but a

[11] Baptism in the Baptist church is the baptism of believers administered in response to a confession of faith and usually by total immersion in a body of water. It is not necessarily the baptism of adults.

participation in the faith of the good news community. In the activities associated with the church fringe God was felt to be present. New prayer meetings and bible study groups arose spontaneously amongst different groups who came to understand God as acting in response to their prayers. God was understood to be *for them,* enabling them to resist drug taking, or to help them to be supportive within their families. The gospel encountered as an enriching community experience produced what Donald McGavran describes as a people movement to Christ.[12]

Situated within a postmodern community the local church can experience a renewal of its ministries of proclamation and even anticipate numerical growth within the congregation. This will involve ceasing to emphasize evangelism as a special effort, or as a series of evangelistic meetings. The church must learn to value new initiatives which bring it into contact with its neighbourhood in face to face ministries of care and liberation. Rather than functioning as a venerable institution, the church can resituate itself within a marketplace of ideas within which it has no special status or influence. It can participate in the market but it can not control the terms of engagement. In a postmodern society the gospel can be heard and received gladly. The gospel contextualized within a rich experience of community can impart what David Clark describes as a *sense of significance* and a *sense of solidarity* which legitimates and values the individual. By making the sacrificial surrender to God and his kingdom for which Jürgen Moltmann calls, the church can identify itself with the sufferings of Christ, and agree to work for the redemption of its neighbourhood, rather than to secure its own privileged place in society. In a postmodern society the rule of God can become tangible within small intimate groups which are focused upon the eschatological horizon from which it is possible to understand that God is *with us*, *for us* and that we *come from God.*

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[12] Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (New York: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 334. I refer to his third category of the homogenous unit.

3.6 ENTERING THE COMMUNITY

As we have seen, to make living contact with the church community is to risk being changed and converted as life's lost narrative is re-established via the narrative of the church. The church community possesses the capacity to so embody the salvation of God, that making living contact holds out the possibility of experiencing that affirmation of selfhood to which David Clark refers. It appears that after the G. L. C. of 1954 only eleven percent of those who confessed faith were received into the life of the church. Surely a loss on this scale is both unacceptable and unnecessary ? We now need to ask, how, after presenting the gospel as the seeking, invasive, love of Christ, which re-orientates individuals and groups toward God, can we press on to firmly initiate them into the community of Jesus ? This question was not adequately addressed by the G. L. C., a fact which contributed to the ineffectiveness of that initiative.

William Abraham in his *The Logic of Evangelism* discusses initiation into the rule of God as a vital aspect of evangelism. He acknowledges that a verbal proclamation of the gospel is an essential feature of evangelization but insists that incorporating new believers into the life of the church is an essential part of the same process. He writes. 'We can best improve our thinking on evangelism by conceiving it as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time'.[13] It follows that Christian initiation is more than taking out a membership: it is the adoption of a new identity, in which the will, emotions, and intellect, are reoriented towards God's kingdom. Entering the community of Jesus means that new habits will be acquired; prayer, meditation, fasting, and bible reading enable the new Christian to re-visualize their understanding of the world and themselves. Abraham discusses a number of features of initiation, three of which are important to my purpose of showing that, in a postmodern culture, the good news of the gospel can be experienced as an enriching experience of community. In turn we will consider initiation experienced as a) baptism, b) adopting

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[13] William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. 95.

the rule of life, or the moral tradition of the church, and c) receiving the creed of the church.

3.6.1 BAPTISM

Abraham sees that, 'the kingdom [of God] is embodied in a community that has a determined and specific character', and which is entered by baptism.[14] By baptism the new believer is incorporated into the church, but it is also a human initiative in which the new believer publicly determines to become a Christian. In Nazareth church the baptistery was situated some distance from the sanctuary and the congregation processed to the ground floor led by the baptismal candidates who in their verbal testimony to the grace of God, and in their request to be incorporated into the believing community, proclaimed the gospel to the gathered congregation. In addition to functioning as an act of incorporation into the church, it was also a celebration of new life in Christ, and this aspect was strongly emphasized. Children crowded around the baptistery, photographs were taken, and after the ceremony a party atmosphere prevailed. Baptism functioned as a pledge to follow Christ in the fellowship of the church, but also as an affirmation of life which had its locus within a living community. In a postmodern context conversion can easily become a means of temporary self transcendence, which might be discarded in the light of a new situation. Philip Sampson makes the point that in postmodern discourses 'there is no fixed point of reference, no object world outside of representation, no knowledge of this world, and that style is nine points of the real'.[15] It is therefore vital that conversion should be earthed by baptism into a supportive and faith nurturing community in which the journey of faith is continued.

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[14] Ibid. p. 132.

[15] Philip Sampson, 'The Rise of Postmodernity', in *Faith and Modernity*, ed. by Philip Sampson & others, (Oxford: Regnum Lynx, 1994), pp. 29-57 (p. 39).

3.6.2 ADOPTING THE MORAL TRADITION OF THE CHURCH

Abraham sees that initiation must also include what he calls , the rule of life, which he identifies with the command to love God and one's neighbour, Mk. 12:29-31. He states that 'one is now under the law of love. The latter must be handed over by the church and the evangelist, and it must be reciprocally received by those baptized as the bedrock of their moral life'.[16] Initiation into the community of Jesus involves adopting his ethical teaching and making it our own. This in itself involves an act of repentance understood as a turning around and a change of direction, in which a new rule of life is adopted, and which itself becomes a transforming and liberating expression of a new self. Not only does the new believer receive the ethics of Jesus, but also the ethics of the Christian community which binds and roots the individual into the church. In a new communality the new Christian participates in the moral and spiritual life of Christ. For the moral relativist, the ethical nature of the kingdom can effectively end the agonizing choices associated with constructing one's own moral values from the recycled fragments of the past or from the prevailing fashion. To receive the rule of life strengthens the bond of the isolated individual with the Christian community.

3.6.3 RECEIVING THE CREED

Abraham considers that no process of initiation can be complete without handing on the intellectual heritage of the church in the form of the creeds, which 'spell out in a comprehensive way the broad outlines of the Christian faith.[...] they presuppose and embody the fundamental convictions about God, about Christ, and about the Holy Spirit'.[17] He favours the Nicean creed which he regards as a succinct summary of the faith, The recently converted Christian who has received baptism and who has consented to live by a new ethical rule, needs to possess a clear statement regarding the faith of the community into which she has been initiated. The faith of the church is

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[16] William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p. 136.
[17] Ibid. p. 148.

more than the faith of the local church; it is the faith of the ancient church, which has passed on its faith to the present day. To receive the creed is to identify the individual with the broad consensus of faith which has existed from earlier centuries. The new Christian who has come to feel that God is *with us, for us*, and that *we come from God*, can enter a tradition in which those same feelings have long been held, and which have nurtured earlier generations. The initiate armed with the creed is able to compare the intellectual conclusions which the early church arrived at, and compare them with her own developing insights. The postmodern tendency to experience time as fragmented, disconnected , and episodic, is thus challenged, not by a metanarrative account of reality, but by a personal developing consciousness which still possesses living links with the earliest thinking of the church.

Christian proclamation can be developed as an enriching experience of community, in which the local church comes to be understood as a good news community in which the rule of God is discovered. The gospel writers portrayed Jesus as the founder of a community within which the active rule of God became intelligible, and within which the end to which God wills to bring humanity was disclosed and appropriated. To be in living contact with a local church community which has made, what Jürgen Moltmann describes as, a costly surrender to God and his kingdom, hopefully means that the heartbeat of the community will be felt. An enriching experience of community can become an experience of God's love, in which the individual feels valued by God, and by the community of Jesus to which she is invited to become part. An enriching experience of Christian community in which God's presence is felt, has the potential to becomes an empowering pathway to faith in a postmodern culture.

CHAPTER 4

THE GOSPEL AS AN EXPERIENCE OF RESTORED SELFHOOD

We have seen that since the end of World War II, three major initiatives deployed to re-evangelize the English people have been unsuccessful, and the numerical decline of the churches has continued. This failure to effectively proclaim the gospel was set against a new cultural background, which was initially understood as an intensification of the secularization of society, but which we have subsequently come to understand as the emergence of a postmodern culture. We have seen that the proclamation of the gospel must be made within the context of these new cultural formations, and that the church must understand its evangelism to be resituated within a marketplace of religious pluralism. I have claimed that within a postmodern culture, the church can again effectively proclaim the gospel and make new disciples. This will involve developing proclamation as an expression of a theology of the cross within an enriching experience of community, which enables fringe contacts to experience the local church as a good news community.

I have claimed that within a postmodern society the church can develop a second fruitful approach to proclaiming the gospel. Within an enriching experience of community, and against the background of fragmented and incoherent notions of selfhood, the telling of the gospel story can relocate the self as a narrative self, which is by nature open to the world and capable of responding to the witness of a living religion. Only by revisioning the self can the response be made for which the gospel calls.

The proclamation of the church calls for an active response to the work of Jesus Christ. It is a call to action, decision, and responsibility, which can only be made by people who are coming to understand their lives as a narrative. The church understands itself to be an eschatological community situated between the resurrection

and the *parousia* of Christ. Whilst its history is a vital part of its present self identity, it is also a community in a state of becoming, a state of hope, to which it invites others to participate. To be drawn into the life of the church will hopefully, mean that the narrative structure of the church's hope, will erode notions of selfhood understood as a constructed self enmeshed in role play. The church invites the fragmented self to revision itself as a self in the making, i.e. as a narrative self in a process of self realization.

Within the fringe activities of the church the non-narrative self can slowly begin to gain new perspectives on her own selfhood. Within this new situation the gospel can be proclaimed; not as a recall to the church, but as a presentation of old, dream like, half forgotten memories, which still circulate within our culture, and which can be recalled and reappropriated within the good news community. Within the rich textures of Christian community, the fragmented selfhood which we have associated with postmodernity, can be revisioned within the story of Israel and the church, and projected onto a future eschatological horizon. The fragmented, incoherent self can experience itself as awakening from a disorientating dream into an intelligible and meaningful narrative.

The strengthening of a narrative identity, and the renewal of a capacity to evaluate the story of the church, creates a new openness to the future, and therefore to the possibility of an experience of God, which we can describe as a transcendent experience. Self transcendence is a human attribute which allows the individual to imagine a future beyond the limits of the present circumstances. It is a state of being which is potentially present to all, and holds out the hope that humanity is not forever doomed to the role play which we have associated with notions of the postmodern condition.When it is associated with an experience of God, self transcendence dissolves notions of the situated self, and calls for a journey of exploration and discovery in which personal agency becomes prominent. In the last section of this chapter, I show that Christian proclamation enables a revisioning of a narrative selfhood, thus allowing dream like memories to be appropriated as a way of

salvation. This renewal of narrative selfhood, and remembering, can lead to an experience of self transcendence and God.

4.1 THE SELF IN CRISIS

In a postmodern society ideas of selfhood remain ambivalent, often assuming crisis proportions. We have seen that in a postmodern culture the individual often understands herself as the victim of corporate forces which can be powerfully manipulative, and which, driven by advertising and the electronic media, create multiple and ephemeral images of the good life, which are made available for experimentation and play. The driven self is a consumer who is constantly being enticed into new patterns of acquisitiveness to which there seems to be no end. The self defining experience of work, in which the temporary contract increasingly determines worth and identity, further confuses notions of self identity. Life which is experienced as a series of unrelated episodes, contributes to the idea of a divided and fragmented self, which can not easily be located and defined. David Harvey quotes one of J. Borges's characters from *The Chronicles of Bustos-Domecq* as asking, 'Who was I ? Today's self, bewildered, yesterday's, forgotten; tomorrow's, unpredictable ? The question marks tell it all'.[1]

The psychotherapist Carl R. Rogers, fully appreciates the elusive nature of human identity. He says, 'It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking, "Who am I, *really*? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behaviour? How can I become myself"?'[2] His question identifies the crisis associated with notions of selfhood experienced in a postmodern society. Rogers feels that the goal which the individual most strives for is to become herself, and not the self which others expect her to be, i.e. the situated, manipulated self which possesses little sense of personal agency or self worth. To exist only in terms of the expectations of others is to consent to be a non-person, enmeshed in role play and lacking any real sense of

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[1] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 41.
[2] Carl R. Rogers, *A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy: On Becoming a Person* (London: Constable, 1990), p. 108.

identity. In order to move beyond this Rogers calls for the removal of inauthentic masks which can be a painful experience, the more so, if they have been previously thought of as the real self. He maintains that the pain associated with relocating the real self needs to be contained in a therapeutic relationship which he describes as a pure culture.[3] The inauthentic masked self which Rogers describes, resonates well with the fragmented and incoherent self which is driven by consumer images, and which experiences life as a series of unrelated episodes.

In order to proclaim the gospel within a postmodern culture, something not unlike Rogers therapeutic relationship needs to exist in what he describes as a pure culture. The church as the community of Jesus is capable of becoming such a culture. With its eyes fixed upon the eschatological horizon it can prophetically disclose the *telos* to which God is striving to bring his creation. Its hope and worship expressed as the firstfruits of the coming kingdom can draw attention to a place where masks can be shed and where the individual can become herself, confess her sins, fully experience her guilt and shame, and know God's love, forgiveness and acceptance. In that context, as an individual member of a larger organism it can also define itself towards or against others. In Rogers's words the individual can realistically ask, 'how can I become myself?' To which the church can answer, 'she can become a self in the making, with other selves'.

4.2 PROCLAMATION AS AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE FRAGMENTED SELF

If follows from what we have seen, that in order to effectively proclaim the gospel the church will need to take note of contemporary ideas of personhood which are prominent within its culture. The church must see that verbally proclaiming the gospel does not guarantee that it has been heard with the understanding which enables the individual to make the response for which it calls. The gospel must be so expressed that it awakens a sense of a narrative identity which enables a living

[3] Ibid. pp. 111-112.

connection to be made between an unalterable past, the present, and a future hope. It must awaken a sense of self transcendence, enabling the situated self to revision itself as a participant in the eschatological hope of the church. Carl R. Rogers has shown that the quest for a restoration of selfhood becomes part of a healing process, which calls for the removal of masks in an environment which is conducive to the well-being of the individual. As with psychotherapy, so with the proclamation of the gospel, the Christian practitioner must so proclaim Christ, that the hearer is enabled to understand herself in a new way, as a narrative self, possessing the power of personal agency and the capacity for self transcendence. In order to achieve this the church can emphasize salvation as a condition which enables a narrative selfhood to be reappropriated, and at the same time show that selfhood is not a human construct but a gift from God.

4.2.1 SELFHOOD AND SALVATION

The offer of salvation, which lies at the heart of Christian proclamation, can be so presented that it enables the hearer to think of herself as possessing a strong sense of narrative identity and personal agency. Roger Dowley's interesting treatment of the Hebrew word *yasha* (salvation), gives creative insights into what it means to live in a therapeutic community designed to promote the well-being of all. He quotes E. M. B. Green who describes the basic meaning as, 'bringing into a spacious, uncramped environment' and 'being at one's ease, free to develop without hindrance'. Dowley adds that, 'Salvation is not only *from* what threatens or oppresses, but must also be *into* release, freedom, well-being and wholeness'.[4] In the above terms salvation is experienced as a process of becoming in which the full potential of a life is experienced. The experience of salvation can be understood as both an event, i.e. something which is realized in an act of decision and commitment; and as a process, i.e. coming under the conditions to which Dowley draws our attention. Under the conditions of salvation the self is called to understand itself as a narrative self,

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[4] Roger Dowley, *Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest* (The Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission, [n.d.]), section 6.

journeying towards a fuller, more complete mode of existence which requires the active participation of a free agent. If salvation is proclaimed simply as the reward of faith, i.e. as something one has to achieve in order to get something desirable, then the postmodern suspicion of the manipulative message is at least understandable. However, if salvation is presented as a condition which enlarges the self, drawing it into a future in which hope and personal fulfillment are prominent, then the self can the more easily understand itself as a living strand within a larger story which requires the individual to understand itself as a narrative self.

4.2.2 SELFHOOD AS A GIFT

Roger Dowley's description of salvation indicates a condition in which a quest for an authentic identity can be pursued without fears of any manipulative intent on the part of the church. The proclamation of the church can be understood not only as a call to appropriate salvation, but also to appropriate that selfhood which is just as much a gift from God as salvation itself. The Hebrew/Christian scriptures consistently portray humanity as being dependent upon, and responsible to God, e.g. they are made in his image and likeness, Gen 1: 26-27. In this sense human identity is understood to be a gift from God, which enables his creatures to represent his rule in the world. Viewing the self as a gift eliminates the need to construct a selfhood, as both selfhood and salvation are given by God. It follows, that the experience of fragmentation and powerlessness need not be regarded as the final state of human selfhood, because telling the story of the church invites us to the quest of appropriating God's gifts. If salvation and selfhood are gifts from God, to be appropriated, then the proclamation of the gospel can address the individual as a self which has the capacity to recall its narrative identity, rediscover its powers of personal agency, and experience self transcendence.

4.3 POSTMODERN NOTIONS OF SELFHOOD

We have seen that a proclamation of the gospel in the Cynon Valley, had the potential to enable the fragmented self to revision itself as a narrative self, which was able to

sympathetically consider and respond to the gospel of Christ. The local church operating in a postmodern culture is still able to win new disciples to Christ. We should however remember that in order to practice effective evangelism, the local church must create a rich texture of community life in which people are respected, and where needs are met in practical ministries of care and support. In this context the church must be attentive to what we can describe as the receptive capacity of its fringe contacts who, in their early stages of contact with a church, may have little capacity to evaluate a presentation of the gospel.

I attribute this loss of a receptive capacity to two features which I associate with the erosion of a narrative identity. First the loss of an historical interpretive framework has created an ambiguity towards the past, which in our society has meant that the Christian religion is perceived as a half forgotten memory, it has become dream like. This historical forgetfulness is now deeply ingrained in our culture, and can create a crisis of identity as I will show from a discussion of the city centre architecture of the West Midland city of Birmingham. Secondly, this loss of a narrative identity has not gone unnoticed by the entertainment and publicity industries who have poured vast resources into creating ever new images of the good life which have overloaded the imagination with unrealizable goals and identities. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh quote Kenneth Gergen who describes this process as social saturation.

> 'Social saturation provides us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self' with which we are perpetually bombarded, but between which it is impossible to choose. The result is that 'the fully saturated self becomes no self at all'. Or to be more precise, we are left with an infinitely malleable self, capable of taking on an infinite array of imprinted identities.[5]

We will see from the work of the pop singer and entertainer Michael Jackson, that social saturation erodes the capacity to evaluate a high profile message addressed to the community at large because it has lost a sense of narrative identity.

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[5] J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used To Be* (London: S.P.C.K. 1995), p. 52.

It would appear that what Gergen calls social saturation is related to an ambiguity towards the historical past which can create a crisis of identity at an individual or collective level. This notion may be expressed as, 'if I am not sure about who I am, then I can become what I like'. I have shown that in spite of a diminished capacity to evaluate a proclamation of the gospel, the church can still make new disciples and experience a renewal of numerical growth. I maintain that a proclamation of the gospel can enable people who have only dream like memories of Christianity to redevelop a narrative identity and positively respond to the message of Christ. Before I show in what terms I envisage an effective proclamation of the gospel against the background of forgetfulness and social saturation I will describe those conditions by discussing the new city centre architecture of Victoria Square Birmingham, and the impact of the entertainer Michael Jackson.

4.3.1 THE FRAGMENTED CITY - BIRMINGHAM

I maintain that the loss of a narrative identity and the phenomenon of forgetting, which I have associated with the notion of social saturation is now deeply ingrained in our culture. I will show that civic culture, in terms of city centre architecture can so obscure notions of selfhood that the story of the city or urban conglomerate is lost or confused. City centre architecture can induce a profound forgetting. If my contention is held to be valid, then clearly this has profound implications for the local church which hopes to proclaim the gospel far and wide to its neighbourhood; thus producing a people movement to Christ.

In October 1964 I arrived in Birmingham just as the new Bull Ring shopping complex was being completed. The area had suffered devastating war damage and it had taken many years to rebuild. As a student and a minister I lived in Birmingham for nine years, during which time I came to know the city very well. The new Bull Ring shopping centre was linked to a lower open air market by ramps and lifts, with the great Rotunda office complex towering above it all. This new concrete and glass structure was to be the new heart of the city. I was the more surprised when revisiting

Birmingham in 1993, to find that the old Victoria Square situated at the opposite end of New Street from the Bull Ring, was being hailed as the new heart of Birmingham.

The architectural forms within the new square, and the skillful use of space are both surprising and fascinating to anybody who remembers the original structures. Originally the square stood as a monument to nineteenth century modernity, albeit with a strong Christian feel to it. In fact it is no exaggeration to say, that in architectural terms, Victoria Square symbolized Christian Birmingham. The Anglican cathedral which lies just beyond the square was once part of the original complex which included the council chambers, the town hall, and the old post office. Civic administration and Christian worship merged together as a cornerstone of the city's identity. The statue of Queen Victoria stood in the centre holding the orb in her hand. She now stands towards the edge of the square which has been completely redeveloped into a postmodern pick and mix architectural pastiche. The original square spoke of Birmingham as the workshop of the world, exporting to the colonies not only her manufactured goods, but also her faith.

Anyone who knew Birmingham city centre in the early 1960s, and returning in the early 1990s, would see that it had changed. Clearly city centres do, and must change, but the changes in Birmingham were not just material. Victoria Square had produced a new elusive feel to the centre which was almost undefinable, and which might be best explained by David Harvey's description of Jonathan Raban's book *Soft City*. Harvey describes the book as a highly personalized account of life in London in the early 1970s. His interest in Raban's views on cities are related to a new emerging urban consciousness which he describes as,

> that cusp in intellectual and cultural history when something called 'postmodernism' emerged from its chrysalis of the anti-modern to establish itself as a cultural aesthetic in its own right.[6]

The most noteworthy property of Raban's city is its softness. It is like a theatre with multiple stages on which individuals can work their own distinctive magic. It is a maniacal scrap book rather than an encyclopedia, filled with colourful entries which

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[6] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 3.

have no relation to each other. In Raban's city fact and imagination fuse together. It is the sphere 'where people were relatively free to act as, and become what, they pleased. "Personal identity had been rendered soft, fluid, endlessly open" to the exercise of the will and the imagination'.[7]

Raban's description of the city gives the impression of a series of parallel universes; it has lost contact with any idea of a collective story and a unifying narrative identity. This loss of a narrative identity was the quality which I found so hard to define in the Birmingham city centre of 1993. The Birmingham city architecture of the 1960s was hard, reflecting the confidence of the urban planners and their dream of a new ultra modern city centre. Victoria Square signalled a change; the heart of the city is now soft. The great edifice at the centre of the new Victoria Square is now a large fountain, (costing three million two hundred thousand pounds to complete) in the form of three bowls, with the water flowing from the first and highest to the lower areas. The water actually flows from the hands of a one and three quarter tonne female figure called The River, which, according to the notes provided by the Indian architect Dhruva Mistry, represents the life force. Who is she we might ask ? The face may well be a smiling sphinx, or is it a Buddha, or Aquarius the water carrier, or all of them together, who can say ? In the lower pool two life size statues entitled Youth, in the form of male and female figures gaze upon each other serenely as the waters of life envelop them. It is difficult to identify them, but then any postmodern identity would probably be capable of more than a single interpretation. At least one reasonable interpretation would be the opposite, yet complementary elements associated with the yin yang binary opposition associated with Chinese philosophy.[8]

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[7] Ibid. p. 5.

[8] In Chinese thought the yin/yang are two great opposite but complementary forces at work in the cosmos. Yin is female, cold, dark, and passive power, Yang represents masculinity, light, and warmth. Yin is Earth, rain, soft, evil, black, small, even (numbers). Yang is heaven, sunshine, hard, good, white, large, and odd (numbers). The two forces together make Chi, or the universal principle governing the universe. The Yin/Yang school of philosophy may have been founded by Tsou-Yen (300-240 B.C.)

On each side of the youths are two huge lion like figures which Dhruva Mistry called Imaginary Figures or Guardians, but perhaps the most amazing feature of the square is yet another large statue called the Iron Man which was donated by one of the large engineering firms of the city. He stands alone, leaning backwards, faceless, featureless. It is clearly a man but dehumanized man. His arms are tightly hugged to his body as if by chains; the casting of the bronze is so indistinct that you can not tell. As a man it is a nightmare: robotic, mummified, demonic. It represents an overwhelming sense of the anti human. The media relations office of the city council have put me in touch with individuals from the original planning team who were pleased to talk to me over the telephone, although no one has been able to say who the figures represent, or why the Iron Man is there at all.

The total impact of the development is bursting with postmodern symbolism, elusive, vivid, challenging us to make sense of the figures which have a New Age feel about them. It is confusing because it does not add up to any identifiable statement about the city, and seems to have consciously displaced an older reality, seizing the new centre as an alien and colonizing force. The new heart of Birmingham has a dream-like feel to it and appears to add nothing to the story of the city. It evokes no memory and points to no ideal. It would appear that Victoria Square has been architecturally deconstructed, a process in which,

> The heroic figures of this, and of every other century [...] [are] cut down to size [...]'Deconstructivist' architecture will choose other peoples heroes and treat them with a total lack of respect.[9]

How then can we speak of the city of Birmingham as experiencing a collective fragmentation and the loss of a narrative identity in relation to its new centre ? I will attempt to answer the question by drawing attention to three effects produced by the new development which I think correspond to some of the features of fragmentation which we have already noted.

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[9] Geoffery Broadbent, 'Deconstruction in Action', *Journal of Architectural Theory and Criticism, Deconstruction: A Student Guide*, ed. by J. G. Glusberg, 1:2: 91 (London: St. Martins Press, 1991), p. 93.

First, the square dissolves identity. Of course old structures need demolishing and replacing, but replacements can take the collective story forward. Victoria square is an attempt to silence a metadiscourse. Second, the figures crowded into the square seem to have nothing in common and become an exercise in meaninglessness. It is a visual spectacular in the city space traditionally reserved to tell the story of the city. If the figures are meant to say something about the collective identity of the population, it can only be that it is fragmented and ambiguous. Third, in Victoria Square the medium is the message in the form of the architectural pastiche in question. City centre architecture usually reminds us of a story or holds out an ideal. The nuclear family is celebrated as the strength of a community in Basildon and Billericay in Essex, in Billingham in Cleveland, and in Ealing Broadway in West London. The different bronze statues may smack of kitsch but the message is inescapable. In Birmingham there is no message, the medium absorbs the message because there is no appeal to a narrative selfhood to which the art can speak.

In the culture of postmodernity whole communities can suffer from a collective amnesia creating a crisis of identity at multiple levels of consciousness. We might well ask what are the available stories which characterize civic identity in the city of Birmingham ? There is the old story of the hard working artisan represented by the old Victoria Square; there is the Bull Ring impulse for modernization, representing the will to strive again after terrible war damage, or, there is the New Age slumber induced by the new square. Which story is my story ? David Harvey's questions seem to be relevant; he asks, 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it ? Which of myselves is to do it ?'[10]

4.3.2 THE FRAGMENTED SELF - MICHAEL JACKSON

The erosion of a capacity to evaluate a proclamation of the gospel should come as no surprise if the forgetfulness, which I have described, is becoming a feature of our society. It seems that forgetting is associated with the erosion of a narrative notion of

[10] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 48.

selfhood which renders identity endlessly fluid, and therefore open to what Kenneth Gergen has called social saturation. The saturated self is not a gift but a product, a human construct, which requires image makers, and an international promotional network which invests great amounts of time and money into creating new images of selfhood for the entertainment industry. In order to more fully grasp the significance of this phenomenon for the proclamation of the gospel in a postmodern culture, I propose to look at the work of the popular singer and entertainer Michael Jackson, who has achieved the status of an influential image maker and cultural icon within the circles of popular music.

Jackson has been very influential in promoting images of the self which have been very popular within the culture at large. His performances have been used with great diversity and flexibility. He has created a high profile image for the soft drink Pepsi Cola, but has also skillfully reworked a montage of events drawn from the life of Christ. His portrayals take the form of spectacular stage shows with vivid special effects induced by lighting, movement and, of course, music. Jackson's portrayals, in common with many pop messages, are devoid of any narrative structure. Their power resides in sliding images which requires the suspending of the critical faculties. Jackson enables his audience to feel his message, which is therefore ephemeral and short lived.

Jackson began his career as a singer/dancer with the Jackson Five which popularized and repackaged black musical styles to the tastes of white audiences. From the beginning, Jackson, now a multimillionaire, specialized in crossing boundaries and assuming new personalities. With the advent of the pop video his talents achieved a global audience, the more so, as he became identified with the endorsing of Pepsi Cola. His message became increasingly a selling message, he became in effect a global advertising hoarding.

Richard H. Roberts discusses Jackson's album *Dangerous* performed live in Bucharest and broadcast on a global network. Roberts describes the performance as 'an eclectic postmodern refunctioning of quasi-religion'. Here we meet Jackson in a religious mode drawing redemption motifs out of the life of Christ. In one

performance Jackson, a) enacts a redemption myth; b) enters the historic world; c) walks on water; d) enacts collapse, death, resurrection, entombment, and ascension; e) Experiences the protection of angels; f) moves in a shekinah like environment.[11] What we are seeing is not the projection of a theological narrative in a series of cameos, but rather the plundering of historic images into the formation of a religious montage. There is no purpose beyond the event itself which is presented simply as an entertainment and therefore has only a short shelf life. Jackson has discarded any pretense to represent a reality, choosing rather to deal in impenetrable surfaces devoid of roots or memory.

Jackson well illustrates the way in which messages are received in the so-called pop culture which has become very influential in British society since the 1960s. Having abandoned the narrative form of communication, he has become a master of constructing multiple images of selfhood which are easily abandoned in order to make way for new ideas. In this process Jackson has achieved the status of a personless person, a product of market forces globalized by the electronic media. With his apparent limitless array of identities he functions only as a signifier, producing and reproducing images eclectically selected from a discarded past, or an imagined fantasy future. As an artist he points to nothing outside of the spectacle of the performance. Participation and event have triumphed over any notion of narrative. He is the creator of worlds but is an alien in all of them.

Michael Jackson and the business corporations for whom he works have deeply influenced the way people in our culture receive and evaluate messages. They have become trivialized and reduced to the status of entertainment and leisure pursuits. The non-narrative form favoured by artists and communicators like Jackson has created a real problem for those who want to share the story of the church within a postmodern culture. It is therefore imperative that the church should not merely try to gain a hearing for the gospel by shouting louder, or by hoping for a return to older

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[11] Richard H. Roberts, 'A Postmodern Church? Some Preliminary Reflections on Ecclesiology and Social Theory', in *Essentials of Christian Community*, ed. by David F. Ford & Dennis L. Stamps (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark , 1996), pp. 190-191.

cultural formations. The church must learn to present its message, so that what have become half forgotten memories, may be recalled and reclaimed by a developing narrative selfhood, a selfhood in the making. As I have indicated this is no easy task, but as we shall see, there are grounds for optimism. For now we can provisionally claim that the fragmented self, characterized by a multiplicity of identities, need not be regarded as a final state of human selfhood. The church which agrees to function within what we have previously described as the democratic religious marketplace, can effectively challenge that notion of selfhood which has been constructed by pop icons like Michael Jackson and the financial corporations for whom he works.

We can now ask, in what terms can we anticipate an effective proclamation of the gospel which enables the fragmented self to revision itself as a narrative self? We have seen that in the Cynon Valley, a new evangelization took place which addressed the fragmentation and incoherence of recently unemployed people by creating a rich experience of community life in which care ministries abounded, and in which remembering became associated with a new Christian identity. We have also seen that both salvation and selfhood can be understood as gifts from God and appropriated in such a way that the individual finds herself moving towards a fuller, more complete mode of existence. We must now show in what terms we can visualize an effective proclamation of the gospel which relocates the fragmented selfhood of postmodernity as a narrative self, with a renewed capacity for remembering, and self transcendence, and which is therefore capable of responding to the witness of a living religion.

4.4 SALVATION OF THE SELF

Under the conditions of postmodernity both the individual and collective notions of identity have experienced a profound disruption. The erosion of a narrative selfhood has created an ambivalence towards the historic past, which has diminished the capacity of many people to evaluate a proclamation of the gospel. However, I have claimed that social saturation, understood in terms of a fragmented and multiple selfhood, are not necessarily a permanent human condition and can be challenged. I have further claimed that a proclamation of the gospel which calls for a response to

the work of Christ, can enable selfhood to be revisioned in three specific ways. First, as a narrative self with a renewed sense of personal agency. Secondly, as a self re-empowered to recall half forgotten memories which open the future to a theology of promise. Thirdly, as a self capable of self transcendence, and the subsequent possibility of experiencing the presence of God. I will now show how I anticipate a revisioning of selfhood as the result of a proclamation of the gospel.

4.4.1 AS A NARRATIVE SELF

The question arises, what kind of selfhood is required which can appropriate the salvation of God ? It is a selfhood awakened to its capacity to respond to a proclamation of the gospel. In order to flourish under the conditions of salvation something akin to a therapeutic community is required in which proclamation can be experienced as both call and response. The gospel can be so proclaimed that it enables the fragmented self to revision itself as a narrative self, possessing the power of recall and an openness to the future. The local church, as we have seen from my work in the Cynon Valley, can draw the disrupted self into a matrix of activities, which, experienced initially as entertainment or leisure activities, can reveal the nature of salvation, and call for a response to its proclamation. The call for a decision which is issued by the church, appeals to a narrative self in the belief that social saturation need not be regarded as a permanent human condition. Ministries which aim to legitimate disrupted people, whilst at the same time sharing the good news of the gospel, can hope to awaken a sense of narrative selfhood.

Paul Ricoeur's work on the hermeneutics of selfhood sheds light on the question, 'who am I ?'. Ricoeur answers that the primary trait of the self is its temporality, it understands itself as a narrative.[12] Anthony Thiselton shows that for Ricoeur 'narrative opens up the notion of an entity who acts and suffers within a framework of continuity and change through the changes and continuities of time'.[13] The church, in its proclamation of the gospel, can aim to address this narrative

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[12] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 2.
[13] Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1995), p.74.

consciousness. By sharing the story of the church in newly established friendship circles, people can be challenged to evaluate and respond to what they hear. By calling for a response to the gospel, the church is addressing that trait of selfhood which is by nature open to change, development, and promise.

The narrative of the church and the non-narrative nature of the postmodern condition can become creatively engaged. Basic to a Christian understanding of humanity is the idea that identity can become confused, the mind can suffer a debilitating disruption which robs life of its power of action and choice. Charles V. Gerkin suggests that in such circumstances there is a need for a '*re-casting* and *"re-ordering"* of the self in relation to a temporal past, present and future'.[14] The Christian community must resist every temptation to manipulate vulnerable people into a commitment to Christ, as this would amount to a violation of their free powers of decision. Rather the church can enable the disrupted self to rediscover its temporality and power of agency, by working to recreate a revisioning of the self. It can become Rogers's pure culture which is essentially a non-manipulative therapeutic environment which enables people to reorientate their lives and discover their real selves. In a web of new relationships and friendships the church can proclaim the horizon upon which its collective gaze is fixed, affirming and publishing what it believes to be the truth. In effect it is inviting the disrupted self to understand itself in a new way i.e., as a self with a narrative identity. In an environment in which selfhood is respected and valued, Christ's presence can be experienced as the result of a proclamation of the gospel. The re-ordered self can rediscover its power of personal agency and positively respond to the good news.

Within this process, the church must understand that whilst it is committed to proclaiming the gospel and calling people to surrender themselves to Christ, the fully saturated self often has no notion of a core self which can be surrendered. In order to experience the self as a narrative self, Ricoeur calls for a detour, 'in which the self discovers a relation between its own memory of the past, its hopes for the future, and

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[14] Ibid. p. 75.

a larger narrative which constitutes the history of God's dealings with the world'.[15] By drawing people into the fringe activities of the local church its eschatological hope can be disclosed as part of a larger narrative with which people can make contact. The future thus becomes open to promise, and a hearing of the gospel becomes possible and intelligible. Ricoeur sees that the restoration of the narrative self enables life to be viewed as a plot which has 'a beginning and an end; a pattern of tension and resolution'.[16] Life lived as a plot is by nature open to the future and provides the conditions in which a theology of promise and hope can be appropriated. Proclaiming the rule of God assumes that notions of selfhood can change; it can be revisioned and revalued within a wider experience of personal transformation.

4.4.2 AS AN ACT OF REMEMBERING

A second feature of proclamation which might enable the fragmented self to revision itself as a narrative self, involves proclaiming the gospel as a half forgotten story which might be reclaimed. Many people have only very vague memories of the stories of the Bible, or even of a link with a church. If older, half forgotten, memories which still circulate within our culture, can be proclaimed as good news, they might become the means by which a new future can be imagined and a new freedom experienced. The half forgotten past can thus effectively point the way to a new future, in which the self can be revisioned beyond the constructs imposed by social saturation. The past, as we have seen from our reference of city centre architecture, can present us with a number of identities from which it is difficult to choose. In order to open the future to a theology of promise, the memories to which I refer, require the religious entrepreneur to practice a principled eclecticism, selecting stories and themes which are able to fund the imagining of a new future. The memories, as we shall see, can be appropriated as a response to the proclamation of the good news community. We are not bound to play out the future in terms of the notions of selfhood we have inherited

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[15] Ibid. p. 76.
[16] Ibid. p. 76.

from our culture; we can become self determining creatures selecting a story of promise which opens the future to us. Peter Baelz reminds us that,

> Men are more than objects. They are also subjects. If they are to exercise their freedom responsibly as subjects, they must continually hold before themselves the ends to which they aspire and for which they are prepared to work, ready to receive the new vision and the fresh insight, from whatever source they may spring.[17]

Walter Brueggemann, in his *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism,* enables us to understand a proclamation of good news as the presentation of old memories, which can become a way of salvation for those who respond positively. He describes the salvific memories of Israel as something which can be colonized by Canaanite outsiders in an act of remembering. Remembering becomes the impetus for a new vision of the self and a way of salvation for people who have become trapped within the roles and identities dictated by their culture. Brueggemann suggests that Israelites and Canaanites were not ethnically distinct groups; the differences resided in social practices and religious commitments. He discusses Joshua's sermon at Shechem, Josh. 24 v 1-13, as a recall to an alternative memory from that of Egyptian slavery and of struggling warring tribes without a secure future. Joshua functions as the spokesman for the faith community and his sermon invokes three half forgotten core memories which lie at the heart of covenant religion, and which, if appropriated, could transform Canaanite outsiders into covenant insiders.

We are asked to imagine three Canaanite people who might have been in the crowd that day, and in so doing he creates a paradigm for evangelism in a world where urban selfhood involves a profound forgetting. The Canaanites he characterizes as sophisticated urban outsiders, who by colonizing Israel's salvific memories may become insiders, rooted in a new people, sharing their eschatological horizon. Brueggemann's imagined characters are selves in crisis, they are manipulated, driven by corporate and economic forces towards which they define themselves as victims, not too unlike the selfhood we have associated with the postmodern condition. In turn

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[17] Peter Baelz, *The Forgotten Dream* (London: Mowbrays,1974), p. 47.

we are asked to imagine the reactions to the sermon of: a young woman from a dysfunctional family, a tired business executive , and a member of the permanent underclass.

Dividing the address into three parts he first recites verses 24:2b-4, an historic memory from Genesis featuring Abraham, and on through the careers of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau.[18] The story relates to the gift of land and the security which comes with it. We are reminded that the patriarchal stories are filled with conflict over land and water ownership, Ishmael verses Isaac, Esau versus Jacob, and Joseph versus his brothers. This is the story of a gift, (of land and a secure future) to a family at war with itself. Brueggemann imagines a young woman from a similarly dysfunctional family torn apart by land quarrels. How could she overcome the quarrelling and in-fighting which was to her a way of life, and which some day would engulf her children? The story operates as an alternative memory to the reality of Canaanite family life, and deciding against despair, she chooses to inhabit a half forgotten memory, thus an outsider becomes an insider. The ancient tradition is recolonized and hope is again in the air. A theology of promise has been appropriated by a response to the proclamation of good news.

Secondly, in verses 5-7, and drawn from the Exodus tradition, we have the contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh's forces as they approached the Red Sea.[19] Chariots faced a retreating slave rabble who cried to the Lord and found deliverance. The story of the invoking of God's power recalled another half forgotten core memory, i.e. a deliverance from tyranny. Brueggemann asks us to imagines a tired business executive in the crowd at Shechem. He was a company robot, drained, misused, and weary, not too different from a nation with it's back to the sea. The story calls for resistance, standing up to the corporation, learning the language of dissent and, who knows, even departure. Once again a vague memory is evoked which calls

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[18] Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), pp. 52-53.
[19] Ibid. p. 54.

for a response, and which thereby enables the situated self to imagine a new empowered selfhood and a new future based upon a hope of deliverance.

Finally in verses 8-13 the struggles of the wilderness years are recited, the battles, struggles, and the entry into a land which had cities and fields ready for use.[20] Brueggemann's imagination stretches to a dispossessed member of the permanent underclass. He had failed to make his way in the world and had reduced his family to poverty and distress. He had come to regard himself as a failure, trapped within circumstances over which he had no control. His alternative half forgotten memory was reawakened by the promise of the gift of 'land on which you had not laboured, towns that you had not built...vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant'.[21] His response could thus claim a stake in a future filled with promise for his family, and new dignity for himself, thus breaking the circle of deprivation.

All of Brueggemann's characters are confined by their own notions of selfhood. They define themselves as victims, overshadowed by unassailable bureaucratic and corporate structures which determine that they shall play the role assigned to them by their culture. The good news is that they can revision their notions of selfhood by responding to a proclamation of old memories which Joshua is suggesting can be reinterpreted for a new future. Those who had become outsiders, because they have become forgetters, might become insiders again by becoming rememberers.

The invitation to remember calls for a revisioning of selfhood as a narrative self which views the future as open, alterable, and capable of sustaining a new hope. To choose to indwell the memories of Israel and the church, is to move into a salvific environment, which we have described as a broadening of life, freedom, wholeness, and a release from trouble. If remembering appears to be another word for dreaming, then, 'We must dream. The dream expresses a fundamental movement of the human spirit. Where there is no vision, the people perish'. [22] The gospel can be proclaimed as

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[20] Ibid. pp. 57-58.
[21] Ibid. p. 59
[22] Peter Baelz, *The Forgotten Dream* (London: Mowbrays, 1974), p. 92.

a process in which old memories which still circulate within our culture, are shown to be available for reappropriation.

4.4.3 AS AN EXPERIENCE OF TRANSCENDENCE

A third feature of a gospel proclamation which enables the fragmented self to understand itself in a new way, arises as a consequence of detour and remembering. That fragmented and incoherent selfhood which we have associated with the postmodern condition and social saturation, can discover its capacity for self transcendence and thereby become open to an experience of God. From a proclamation of the gospel there arises both a call and a promise. On the basis of the life, death, resurrection, and *parousia* of Christ, it offers life and salvation to people who are assumed to be in bondage and in need of deliverance. The good news of salvation tells us that through Christ we can be freed from bondage and may become alive to the presence of God. This promise and hope implies a capacity for self transcendence, which is associated with a response to the good news of the gospel. The self which has found the capacity to positively respond to the gospel, the promise of an eschatological future, and to God, is of necessity a narrative self which is radically open the future.

We can now ask, in what sense does self transcendence open to us the possibility of experiencing God ? Jürgen Moltmann recognizes that we can only speak of the possibility of an experience of God in terms of 'the non-objective context of human experience of the self'.[23] Whilst God is never an object of general experience, Moltmann claims that 'God can still be present as transcendental constitution of the human self-consciousness, which is at the centre of the world in which the human being lives'. He identifies the presence of the divine Spirit in human beings in terms of 'their openness to the world'.[24] This openness is implicit in the concepts of detour and remembering which enables people to understand

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[23] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1992), p. 31.
[24] Ibid. p. 32.

themselves in a new way, as self transcendent beings with a narrative identity, open to an eschatological future, and to that frame of mind which can claim, that God is *with us*, *for us*, and that henceforth we *come from God.*

The erosion of a narrative selfhood has become a feature of a postmodern society, and, as we have seen, it is reflected in areas as diverse as popular music and city centre architecture. Neither the fragmented, incoherent self, nor the fully saturated self can easily evaluate a proclamation of the gospel or respond positively to the offer of salvation. Nevertheless evangelization can be effective within a postmodern culture leading to a spiral of numerical growth in the local church. As we have seen from the G. L. C., gospel proclamation is never more ineffective than when it is deployed outside of a rich experience of community in which people are legitimated and valued. If however, proclamation is deployed within a matrix of community and social events, it has the capacity to relocate that primary trait of selfhood which Paul Ricoeur describes as a narrative self. Only as people come to understand themselves as open to the future,can older salvific memories which still circulate in our culture, be recalled and recolonized. In this process the self can revision itself as self transcending and open to the presence of God.

CHAPTER 5

REVISIONING THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CHURCH

This thesis began by identifying a problem which is readily acknowledged by the churches in the mid 1990s, namely, that since 1945 the proclamation of the church has become less effective. This is attested by numerical decline within the churches, and by the disappointing response to three major evangelistic initiatives which have been deployed within the last fifty years. We have seen that the failure to re-evangelize post-war England is not related to a lack of effort on the part of the churches, but rather to their failure to grasp the new emerging cultural configurations in which a verbal proclamation of the gospel must be made.

We have seen that the failure of the church is not related to a loss of religious belief within society. Indeed, belief is still widespread and circulates in both orthodox and unorthodox forms. The problem facing the would-be evangelist is related to verbally proclaiming the gospel within a postmodern culture, in which high profile messages tend to be treated with suspicion. The evangelist's problem is compounded by what I have described as the loss of a narrative interpretation of history, the consequences of which enable the Christian religion to be understood as fitting into the prevailing religious pluralism of a postmodern culture. It follows that evangelization is now situated within a postmodern context which does not think of the church as the custodian of its sacred traditions. The church is now one voice amongst others, it is inescapably located within a marketplace of religious needs and wants. It follows, that proclaiming Christ as the Saviour of the world, and calling for a response to his work, must increasingly be understood as a dialogue with our culture, rather than a recall to old certainties underwritten by the church.

In order that the local church might effectively proclaim the gospel, verbal proclamation must translate into practical ministries of liberation and service, in

which it becomes apparent that the church is less concerned with its own security and status, and more concerned with the well-being of its neighbourhood. In order to bring a new faith community to birth, the church must make a costly surrender to God and his kingdom, a surrender which becomes a contemporary participation in the sacrificial self giving of Christ expressed as ministries of care and liberation. This cross centred dialogue which I envisage, involves a twofold approach on the part of the local church.

First, it can aim to draw a new fringe membership into a matrix of high quality leisure events (see fig. 1) which have the capacity to create and sustain that quality of community in which people come to feel legitimized and valued. In this context faith can be shared within new friendship circles, on a one to one basis, or within small groups. This dialogical approach to proclaiming the gospel, enables the local church to re-think its approach to evangelizing its neighbourhood beyond identifying itself with a crusade or national initiative. It can, as we have seen, enable the church to restructure its satellite organizations, so that the good news of God's salvation becomes accessible to people who would not normally value a link with a Christian church. My experience in the Cynon Valley shows that this approach enables the presence of God to be felt within new circles of friendship.

Secondly, bearing witness to Christ within a renewed experience of community, challenges distorted notions of selfhood. The church can anticipate that evangelism based on this model will enable fringe contacts to respond to the gospel. Initially, this may amount to only occasional attendance at worship, but a process is being initiated in which the individual can begin to revision herself as a narrative self, with a renewed capacity to identify with the story of the church, which she has previously understood as one story among others. The half forgotten stories of a man called Jesus can become vivid, attractive, challenging, and alluring, to people who are drawn into an encounter with a faith community. The church can become a safe place in which a quest for self identity may take place, and where notions of selfhood, understood as a powerless victim, can be shattered. This renewed power of personal agency can reawaken a sense of self transcendence and an openness to God.

5.1 CHURCH PLANTING IN TILBURY

It will be helpful to further expand my understanding of a contemporary evangelization, to discuss an exercise in church planting, which, as the Association Missioner of the Essex Baptist Association (E. B. A.), I was required to undertake in 1990. After an initial survey of the county I selected the dockland town of Tilbury situated on the north bank of the river Thames. Tilbury offered the opportunity to further develop the evangelistic methods and insights which had proved to be helpful in the Cynon Valley in the 1980s.

In 1888 Tilbury became the dormitory community for a new dockland complex which was excavated by Irish labourers who remained to work as dockers; naturally a Roman Catholic church was formed alongside the Anglican, the only Non-Conformist church being Methodist, which, in 1991, had an active membership of eight to ten mostly elderly people. The town is characterized by multiple layers of deprivation: 20.2% of households have only one parent, 37% do not possess a car, 27% are unskilled or semi-skilled, 30% are part time workers, and 17.9% are unemployed.[1] Tilbury is perceived as a place from which people aspire to escape.

The community is clearly affected by many of the features which we have noted as characterizing the postmodern condition. Work experience is fragmented and haphazard and few have any illusions of being employed for very long. This inevitably leads to several part time jobs being held at the same time. The temporary contract is a fact of life for civil servants and factory workers alike. Today few people have work in the docks and, like Birmingham, the community has lost any sense of a collective identity. St. Chad's local secondary school reflects this lack of hope for the future, and in 1995 was rated third bottom of the new national league tables which monitored each schools performance. Images of the good life are gleaned from television and advertising, and consumerism seems to be regarded as the highest good. On Saturdays the town is almost deserted as people travel three miles to the local Lakeside shopping centre, one of the largest shopping malls in Europe. In contrast to Tilbury, the

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[1] Jay Shuler-Wilson, 'Mission Opportunities For You and Your Church Through the Tilbury Project'(unpublished [n.d.]), A report to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri.

complex is a Shangri-La just beyond the squalor, a temple to an unknown god, a place in which to dream and spend.

Our survey work, on attitudes to the community in general, revealed that religious affiliation is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, although most confess to never attending church, and a significant number hold no Christian belief at all but speculate about numerous New Age theories. It came as no surprise to see that, although Tilbury has a cheerful Cockney disposition, it was deeply suspicious of all Christian truth claims. Quality of life is based upon what can be acquired and held; for many young people this leads to crime and drug abuse, both of which are widespread in the community. It is no exaggeration to say that the most valued acquisition would be a secure job and a one way train ticket out of Tilbury, it follows that those stuck in the town have, in general, a low self esteem.

The town was described by the superintendent of the E. B. A. as an unpromising area for an experiment in evangelization which aimed to produce a new Baptist church community. In the dockland multicultural town of Tilbury the loss of a narrative identity is profound. From the beginning it became obvious that in order to effectively proclaim the gospel and call for a decision to follow Christ; the church planting team which I led, would have to work for the creation of a community in which God could be felt to be present and active, and which aimed to change negative images of selfhood.

5.2 PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL IN TILBURY

In the early stages of planning, the Baptists and Methodists decided to work together and base the new work on the Methodist church buildings. In addition the E.B.A. and the Cooperative Baptist Movement (C. B. F.) of Missouri U. S. A., agreed to support the project by providing both finance and regular incoming teams to support the church planting team. The development of a new approach was set against the background of other churches which were also engaged in preaching the gospel in the town, but who were failing to make new disciples on a measurable scale. It will be

helpful to note their approaches to evangelization because whilst we affirmed their ministries, we wanted to go beyond them.

The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches understand proclamation in terms of the priest's homily within the context of worship and in terms of confirmation and marriage preparation. Both churches have various societies, e.g. scouts and women's meetings, etc. and regard these areas as their primary points of contact with the community, into which most of their energy is given. There is however no discernible strategy to use them as a means to develop a new fringe membership which might open up new evangelistic ministries. Rather, they function as leisure activities for those who are already linked with the churches; and as an inducement to remain. As with the community at large, it is a question of holding what you have and praying for better times.

The large Assemblies of God Pentecostal church in nearby Grays have attempted to establish a satellite congregation in Tilbury for many years. Their work seems erratic; sometimes they have a Tilbury congregation of forty to fifty, but on several occasions it has collapsed into single figures and disbanded, only to try again a year or so later. Their proclamation style is modelled on revival meetings which create some interest in the town. They advertise healing ministries, promise signs and wonders, and bring in their own evangelist for a week or two, who energetically preaches for instant conversions. Workers are bussed in to visit every home and transport is arranged for the infirm.

5.2.1 REPEATING THE PAST

The Roman Catholics and Anglicans are locked into a niche market and find it difficult to operate outside of their institutional structures. In order to hear the message of the gospel it is necessary to find your way into the structures of the churches, which are impenetrable unless you are a child, elderly, or a practicing member. In contrast the local workmen's clubs, and Pensioners Association are thriving and easily joinable. The Catholic and Anglican churches are still practicing the evangelism of the T. C. E. initiative, seeing themselves as a home to which people

must return, they are the custodians of sacred traditions and their great strength is in the pastoral care and visiting ministries which they provide for their membership.

The Pentecostals are very strong on verbal proclamation, their emphasis on instant conversion and a new creation is usually received enthusiastically, but their failure to emphasize evangelism as an experience of initiation into a supportive and enriching experience of community has always left them with a dwindling disheartened rump after a few months; their satellite congregation will simply not take root. Their proclamation model is still controlled by the revivalism style of the G. L. C. and inevitably with similar overall results. Our own survey work has located numerous embittered and disillusioned ex-converts who felt abandoned and deserted when the Pentecostals left town. The wider non-churchgoing population of Tilbury was not being reached and drawn into the community of Jesus by any of the churches working in the town.

Both of the above models of proclamation are in turn the T. C. E. and the G. L. C. writ small; models which, as we have noted, have conspicuously failed to win a new mass membership to the church. The Anglican and Catholic approach works in a niche market in which verbal proclamation is an in-house activity and therefore has little impact upon the community. There is no attempt to scrutinize the community and develop entrepreneurial approaches to evangelism. In common they provide good pastoral care and a positive experience of community for their members, who are also enabled to feel the presence of God as wonder and mystery in their rich liturgical worship. However, their proclamation is contained within the institutional life of their churches which makes little contact with the non-churchgoing public.

In contrast the Pentecostals are able to mobilize their membership in such a way that the community is clearly impacted by their door to door work, high profile healing ministries, and their intense preaching style. Their verbal proclamation reaches beyond a niche market but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is rather manipulative and controlling, and therefore self defeating in the long term. The Pentecostals working in Tilbury have a narrow field of interest. Their aim is to get souls converted, and therefore they work for a decision to follow Christ, with little

thought given to how a rich experience of community might draw unchurched people into the life of faith. It seemed that proclamation in Tilbury would need to steer between the Scylla and Charybdis.

5.2.2 REVISIONING PROCLAMATION

The Baptist/Methodist approach required leadership which could contextualize evangelism within ministries of care and support, whilst also giving due attention to the social conditions of the town, and the prevailing cultural background against which people lived their lives. It needed to work within existing care structures provided by other agencies, but also to implement new ministries of care and support, which would create a new community life based on the Methodist premises. Within this new concept it was anticipated that a verbal proclamation of the gospel would be sustained.

We appointed a husband and wife team who were both trained as ministers and social workers, and who became deeply involved in the existing care agencies which worked in the town. The new workers linked themselves, and other team members, with the Family Support Unit, which had been established by the local district council, and which gave practical help and support to families. Furniture, carpets, fridges, prams, cots, and clothes were found for people in special need, and advice in dealing with bureaucracies was given to less urgent cases. Links were developed with the Beacon Trust, a counselling centre for chemically dependent people, a number of whom eventually came to a special Bible study discussion group designed for them. Links were developed with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which had a branch in town, and a liaison group was developed which linked all the caring agencies of the district, and which now includes all the churches. Links have been developed between the social services and the church, and the Methodist premises are used as a meeting place for social workers and those of their clients who are reluctant to keep appointments in more formal surroundings. The ministers have played a full part in sharing a case load and are willing to follow up on difficult people. They have consistently claimed that by working with the secular care

organizations they are helping to create the conditions which we have associated with salvation, i.e. the deliverance *from* threat and oppression, and *into* release, freedom, and well-being. Both ministers and teams recognized that they were working in a marketplace of human needs and wants, and had no illusions about the diminished status of the church in the town. Proclamation was understood in terms of a face to face dialogue which took place at numerous levels, and which called for ministries of sacrificial service and care to a deeply fragmented and incoherent community.

Whilst the new leadership gave the existing secular care ministries their full support, they also supplemented them by developing new Christian ministries based upon the Methodist church. They were very intentional about verbally proclaiming Christ to the neighbourhood, but planned to contextualize this within new Christian ministries of care and support, which would be an extension of their role as community workers. They anticipated that the new work would translate into a rich experience of community for numerous people who would thereby come to understand the nature of the Christian faith.

As the church is immediately adjacent to the town market, they began by opening a pavement cafe for tired shoppers; this provided an opportunity to meet old clients and make new contacts. The cafe has led to many new friends being made and has become a counselling centre operating under another name. In addition the four schools in Tilbury have been regularly visited by the ministers and their teams, who have organized dance, drama, and puppet theatre workshops etc. Soon the church was invited to hold a Holiday Bible Club in a school, and this has led to a monthly craft club for children based on the church premises. Parents have come along to help, and a new Sunday School has been formed which has recruited from their ranks. A natural development of the above work has been the inception of a parent and toddlers group which is about to move from meeting once to twice a week. Our regular contacts with teachers has led to St. Chad's Secondary School asking the church to start a Christian Union for them; this has created opportunities to take assemblies and lead R.E. classes.

Early contact with new mothers has proved to be of great value and new links have been developed with the medical centre, especially with the two midwives based on the practice, who ask new mothers if the ministers may visit. If this is possible, a gift pack is taken for the new child, and an invitation is extended to the parents and toddlers group, thereby new mothers are linked with other parents. This regular contact with mothers has resulted in a craft club being established for them, which has been led by a team member from an E B. A. church, and which has brought a number of parents into the worshipping life of the growing fellowship. As trust has grown, opportunity has existed for faith sharing which usually takes place in the context of developing friendships and social activities. The church fringe is being enlarged and slowly brought to faith. On occasions other more visible events have taken place. In the spirit of the On Fire initiative, the church has organized street entertainment in the market area and put on a three hour road show with clowns, conjurers, an escape artist, musicians, chalk artists, stilt walkers, etc. The onlookers clapped and cheered for three hours and faith sharing was deliberate and open, with lots of information on the activities of the church being distributed.

The C. B. F. have provided a full time youth worker for the area who has linked herself with the town youth centre, and developed a Christian Union in St. Chad's School, whilst also developing a new church youth group. She became an enormous asset to the church and community, organizing numerous outings and activities for young people, including a basket ball training camp, which involved importing a team from America, complete with a professional coach who gave a week of tuition free to all young people. In three years, beginning in 1993, the church moved from being an invisible presence to being a vibrant centre of community life, which can meet human need at numerous levels. As I write, plans are developing to open a launderette and play area in the church for families who do not possess washing machines.

Our new ministries have effectively created a new community life around the Methodist church, which has drawn in children, teenagers, young parents, and elderly people. The regular worshipping congregation has risen to thirty in three and a half

years, and for special occasions, of which there are many, a congregation of eighty is not unusual. A conservative estimate suggests that the church is in living contact with about two hundred new people. The congregation and fringe associates include Roman Catholics, Romanian and Greek Orthodox, Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, and people with no faith at all. All feel welcomed and comfortable within the rich texture of community life in which human needs are met, and in which a clear unambiguous sharing of good news takes place.

5.2.3 FEATURES OF A REVISIONED PROCLAMATION

The church planting experiment in Tilbury has shown that effective evangelization can take place in communities which are affected by many of the features which we have noted as characterizing the postmodern condition. In Tilbury employment is very often experienced on the model of the temporary contract, which places great strain upon families which form their values and hopes from the images projected by advertising, and the electronic media. Consumerism is conceived of as the highest good but this is set against the background of permanent insecurity within family and the world of work.The ongoing struggles with bureaucracies produce a victim mentality which results in low self esteem which is widely felt in the community. This in turn creates a residual anger and crime. For many people life is experienced as a daily crisis, with little thought given to what the future might hold for them. In Tilbury notions of a narrative selfhood and self transcendence are weak, and religion is associated with fairy tales and children's stories.

I maintain that within communities like the Cynon Valley and Tilbury, making new disciples, and building a new church membership, can again become a reality for the local church if attention is given to the features of proclamation to which I have drawn attention. I am suggesting that:

- Entrepreneurial leadership must be found which can sympathetically grasp the complexities of the prevailing culture and work with the grain of the community rather than against it. The church must understand itself to be working within the limits and opportunities which are dictated by its culture.

- The church must understand itself to be a servant community expending its energies and resources on behalf of its non-members. It must become deeply engaged with the needs of its neighbourhood having abandoned anxiety about its own future in a period of numerical decline.
- Ministries must be developed which aim to meet human need, and also to draw people into the fringe activities of the church, where, in the context of numerous leisure pursuits, they are empowered to hear the gospel with understanding. Legitimated and valued within a rich experience of community, people can come to understand the good news as an encounter with a good news community.
- Verbal proclamation must never be substituted by ministries of care, support, and leisure; rather, it must be recontextualized within them, so that together they point to the redeeming work of Christ, and to the conditions which we have associated with salvation. This implies that the church must work to create a rich experience in which God can be felt to be active and present to all.

I maintain that as people come to feel valued and empowered within the church community, and the ministries which it offers, they are, however slowly, likely to identify themselves with the story which it tells. In a postmodern culture, half forgotten memories of faith, which circulate in both families and communities, can be remembered and reclaimed, as the good news of the gospel is presented as a call for decision and action. The church proclaims that in Christ God has come to meet and save us, directing us toward an eschatological future in which our well-being is assured. In Tilbury, as in the Cynon Valley, the driven, fragmented, incoherent self, can not easily appropriate a theology of promise and respond to the gospel. The church however can itself become a good news community in which people come alive to the presence and activity of God, and in the process rediscover their own renewed power of personal agency.

5.3 EFFECTIVE EVANGELIZATION

Any proclamation initiative in the 1990s must be deployed against the background of a postmodern society, in which a metanarrative interpretation of history, and notions

of narrative identity have been eroded. Against this cultural background I have shown, that both in the Cynon Valley, and in Tilbury, the gospel of Christ has been effectively proclaimed by the local church, new disciples have been made, people have been initiated into the kingdom of God, and the church has experienced numerical growth. The model of evangelism which I have described, enables the local church to understand itself as a missionary community formed around the cross. As such it must scrutinize its neighbourhood, seeking to create numerous points of contact by which a clear verbal proclamation of the gospel might be made. It is a proclamation which calls for a conversion to Christ as the Saviour of the world, issues a call to become a living member of his community, and points toward an eschatological horizon from which the final rule of God will be revealed.

I have argued that the church must understand itself to be a postmodern church; its influential position in pre-war society has been eroded, and its message is increasingly interpreted as but one among others. Whilst it is operating in the marketplace of religious pluralism I maintain that it is still able to effectively proclaim the gospel. Specifically, the local church can aim to draw people into a matrix of community events, enabling them to encounter its ministries of care within the various leisure activities which it develops. In this context, as people come to feel valued and legitimated, a sympathetic hearing of the gospel becomes possible. Given time, the church can call for a response to the proclamation of Christ, which has the effect of relocating a sense of narrative identity. The individual can experience a renewal of personal agency and choose to identify their lives with the story of the church.

5.3.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

First, by adopting the above model, the church will be enabled to understand evangelism as initiating a process rather than a crisis. We have seen that the G. L. C. understood proclamation as a single event in which a sermon preceded a call to faith: the congregation was urged to respond instantly without reflection or questions. This crisis model often seems to be initially successful, but over time its effectiveness can

be questioned. The model which I have described enables the local church to understand evangelism as a process which it can fully own and deploy within its neighbourhood. By creating a programme of varied quality events, in which faith sharing takes place within the context of new friendships, a process of self discovery is initiated. The old stories of the Bible, and notions of an eschatological future, can enable the individual to connect with a theology of promise and, however slowly, come to identify their aspirations with the story of the church. The church can function as a therapeutic community in which it becomes safe to explore those dream like memories which circulate within our culture, and which, in time, might be recolonized as an act of faith. The church can consent to enhance this process by aiming to create that quality of community in which people feel valued and respected, and in which a process of self discovery is encouraged. Dave Tomlinson has shown that by enabling the postmodern imagination to revision itself within a supportive community, a new effective evangelization can take place.

Second, Christian ministers must come to understand themselves as entrepreneurs whose training enables them to scrutinize their neighbourhood with a view to bringing it into living contact with the fringe activities of the churches. Their training must ensure that they are enabled to develop new creative approaches to proclaiming the gospel by maximizing contact between the church and the neighbourhood. John Finney reminds us that,

> For most people the corporate life of the church is a vital element in the process of becoming a Christian and for about a quarter it is the vital factor. Forms of evangelism which fail to recognize this are doomed [to failure].[2]

We have seen that the T. C. E. initiative bemoaned the fact that clergy were failing to exercise a converting ministry but that this was broadly understood as successfully recalling the nation back to the sacred traditions of which the church was the custodian. In a postmodern context there can be no question of proclaiming the gospel as a recall to the old, old story. Christian leaders must develop the skills

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[2] John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does it Happen ?* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 43.

associated with entering a dialogue with their culture and training their congregations to grasp the implications of this approach.

Third, the model which I have described locates the practice of Christian proclamation within the congregation. Ministries of care: the developing of a fringe membership, the creation of a programme of quality leisure events, and a dialogical sharing of the good news within new friendship circles; all anticipate the full participation of the congregation in the ministry of evangelization. This implies that evangelism specialists, e.g. the teams which came into Tilbury, will be called upon to support the work rather than dictate its direction and shape. This effectively brings the ministry of proclaiming Christ back into the centre of congregational life.

Fourth, the entrepreneurial approaches which are required by the second and third points, enables the churches to move beyond their niche market, and the anxiety associated with saving the church from further numerical decline and loss of prestige. The model which I have envisaged enables the church to gladly hear the voice of its community. In Tilbury our community survey revealed that young parents broadly welcomed the idea of a new church, but especially asked that it should work with teenagers, who were held to be vandals, and the elderly, who were afraid to venture from their homes after dark. They were worried about the plight of their parents and also of what their children might become. By listening to the collective voice of the community the church was able to develop ministries which met felt needs and drew all of the above groups into the church fringe.

5.4 IN CONCLUSION

The insights which I have described relate to the practice of effectively proclaiming the gospel against the background of a postmodern society, in which high profile messages, addressed to the community at large, are treated with some suspicion. The approaches which I have described point towards a new engagement, in which the local church can reach its neighbourhood with the good news of the gospel. They are offered not as a panacea for the problem of numerical decline, but as insights which might be adapted by the local church which wants to effectively proclaim the gospel

to its neighbourhood. We have seen that in Tilbury our approach has led to a new effective evangelization which seems to be sustainable.

The three insights which I commend to the churches can be discussed in isolation but are in fact closely related. First, proclamation of the gospel must be informed by a theology of the cross. Second, proclamation must be recontextualized within a rich experience of community. Third, the call for a response to the gospel can enable the individual to revision herself as a narrative self, which is open to the future, to the witness of a living religion, and to God. In order to draw to a conclusion I will discuss my findings in relation to the work in Tilbury. I do this in the hope that my work may be helpful to those who recognize that proclamation needs to be understood as a dialogue within a postmodern culture.

First, Christian proclamation can be expressed in a number of imaginative ways but it is inescapably verbal in character. In Tilbury words alone meant little. Only as the local church contextualized its message within a culture of service and sacrificial self giving, could the gospel be heard with understanding. Only as the church was seen to be a reproduction of the sacrificial, self giving of Christ, were the acids of suspicion dissolved. Jürgen Moltmann has shown us that only by making a costly sacrifice to God and his kingdom can the new Christian community come to birth. In Tilbury the verbal proclamation of the gospel became good news within the context of ministries of care, support and leisure. It follows that the church must understand itself as a missionary/servant community. It exists to carry the message of Christ into the world in words and deeds, a task which calls for a reproduction of Christ's sacrificial service.

By consenting to function as a servant community, the church no longer requires the status which comes from understanding itself to be the custodian of the sacred traditions of the nation. Within the prevailing religious pluralism it can agree to work within the marketplace of human needs and wants. The high profile messages, which we have identified with the T. C. E. and the G .L. C., can be abandoned by the local church in favour of low profile messages, which aim to draw attention to the salvation of God in a dialogical encounter with its neighbourhood. If the implications

of becoming a servant church imply a loss of status on behalf of the church, it is a loss which enables it to function more effectively as a missionary movement.

Second, proclamation can be recontextualized within a rich experience of community, in which people whose lives have become characterized by fragmentation and incoherence, can hear the gospel with understanding, and respond to its invitation. To create and sustain such a community is a costly service which will involve supporting the various care services which exist in the neighbourhood. It will also involve drawing people into the fringe activities of the church, and developing care and leisure services, in which it becomes possible to share the good news in newly established friendship circles.

I have suggested that the experience of the church as a community must involve both a sociological and a theological dimension. Sociologically, it must value and legitimate people, enabling them to realize their own worth and significance. Outings, sport, and fun events can introduce people to a world of play and laughter to which children are naturally drawn with parents inevitably following. Play opens to us the feelings of other people. 'Humour is part of play. Good laughter cements social relationships and lightens the heaviness of any situation'.[3] Not only does play create the context for good proclamation, but it values the participants, it indicates worth, and enables suppressed feelings to surface through the fears and anxieties of careworn lives. Theologically, the community life of the church can be experienced as the presence of God, in which he is felt to be *with us* and *for us,* working on our behalf. As the church sustains a verbal proclamation pointing towards the eschatological horizon, a new identity can be imagined in which we can understand ourselves as a new creation i.e. *we come from God.*

In Tilbury the church developed multiple points of contacts with its neighbourhood which drew many new people into its fringe activities. People came initially because of the support services and leisure activities, but as friendships developed, and as faith sharing was sustained, they felt enabled to respond to the

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[3] Elaine Storkey, *The Search For Intimacy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 85.

presence of God by attending worship services and inquirers groups. Unlike the Roman and Anglican churches, the Baptist/Methodist initiative made living contact with the community at large. Unlike the Pentecostal missions which called for an immediate response to the proclaimed word, it was grounded in a rich experience of community which aimed to initiate a process rather than a crisis of decision. By sustaining a verbal proclamation of the gospel within a rich experience of community, the church made new converts who were slowly drawn towards Christian initiation. In both its sociological and theological dimensions the church was experienced as a good news community.

Third, a rich experience of community, of which a theology of promise has become a prominent feature, enables the incoherent fragmented self to revision itself. I have found that what I have described as the church fringe, can function both as a therapeutic community, within which people feel legitimated and valued, and as a pointer towards a future hope. The church fringe can become a safe place for revisioning the self. In new friendship circles, characterized by ministries of care and leisure, a verbal proclamation of the gospel can be made, which: calls for a response to Christ's work, is perceived as non-threatening, and which can therefore be sustained over time. In this process the church can help people to resist the conditions which we have associated with social saturation, and, it can enable people to revision themselves, as narrative selves, capable of identifying their unalterable past, and their hopes for the future, with the hope of the church. It is a process in which masks, or constructed ideas of selfhood, can be abandoned, and the story of the church can be adopted, within what has become a therapeutic community or a pure culture. In this context the notion of making a response to Christ, challenges unstable notions of selfhood and calls for the revisioning of the self as a narrative self, which has the capacity to respond to the gospel as the reappropriation of half forgotten memories. Thus empowered by a narrative understanding of the world and the self, the family or individual, drawn into the fringe life of the church, can become open to the future, can experience self transcendence, and can come to know the presence of God.

I have shown that during the last fifty years the proclamation of the gospel has been ineffective, in as much as numerical decline has remained a dominant feature of English and Welsh church life. I have attributed this condition to the development of new cultural configurations, with which the church has not yet adequately engaged; and to ambivalent notions of selfhood, which the church has not yet adequately addressed. I have shown that a new evangelization can become effective in a postmodern society. The approaches to which I have drawn attention can be developed by the religious entrepreneur who is prepared to scrutinize her neighbourhood, seeking out and developing points of contact, in which a verbal proclamation of the gospel might be made. The insights which I offer are a modest contribution to those churches which are committed to verbally proclaiming the good news of the gospel, and to calling for a response to its claims upon our lives. They are offered in the hope that the proclamation of the church may again become effective in the early decades of the twenty first century.

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