

**The Future of the Missional Church:  
Its Potential in the Multicultural Setting of Canada**

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I would like to begin on a personal note. This request to present some thoughts on the future of the missional church in the Canadian multicultural context has been a challenging and a helpful task for me in reframing my thinking around categories more at home in the Canadian context. It has been some time since I have been able to think about church life through perspectives related to the Canadian context. I have spent  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my adult life in an American social and intellectual context and there has been a constant tension between my ways of thinking and categories relevant to the American context – it has been an uneasy tension. So, I have found preparing for this presentation a refreshing experience.

However, I need to share one caveat. The deeper I dig into this theme, the more issues and tangents I am uncovering that need to be addressed concerning the implications of missional church in the Canadian religious and cultural contexts. So what I present here are some initial thoughts about the missional church in Canada – thoughts I hope will generate critical questions and dialogue to sharpen my thinking and engender deeper reflection on what it means to be the people of God participating with God in God’s mission of redeeming and reconciling humanity to himself through Jesus Christ in the Canadian multicultural context.

I have been involved in reflecting on the kingdom of God or God’s reign, *missio Dei*, ministry and Christopraxis, missional church, missional leadership or servanthip, postmodernity, and faith and culture ever since I transitioned from pastoral ministry in Edmonton in 1993 and engaged in doctoral studies in education at Trinity in Deerfield. Through reading and reflecting in these fields, as well as being engaged in numerous interactions with colleagues at Trinity and Northern, as well as colleagues associated with *the Gospel and Our Culture Network*, and *the Center for Parish Development*, I have been shaped in my theological praxis in such a way where I dare state that the future of the church – either in Canada or the United States – has no future unless it becomes missional. I believe there is little hope in reclaiming a church that can find a future in Christendom – Christianity is no longer the sole definer of Western culture.

Now this is not to place limits on God. I am all too aware that God is not limited by our inadequate efforts, and that particularly in our weakness God is able to manifest his presence. However, to be church in a way which is not missional, wherein we have been far too long to one degree or another, is for me a question of obedience: By neglecting to be missional, the church fails to be fully engaged in what God’s mission calls us to as God’s people in the world.

And this brings me to the topic on which I was asked to reflect this morning: “The Future of the Missional Church:” Its Potentials and Perils in the Multicultural Setting of Canada. However, I have reframed this to focus primarily on the potentials – the perils I am sure will surface as others critique the short-sightedness of what I offer here.

One further caveat – in many ways I am trying to still figure how we are to live **presently** as the sent community of Christ in the world in light of God’s missional activity, so I have not given much thought to the “future.” However, I believe the future telos of God is creative of our present and any faithful future grows out of this present engagement of God’s telos; so with this understanding I offer some preliminary insights.

When we talk about the future of missional church, we need to engage this issue on two fronts: one within the church context which confronts pragmatic understandings of church, and two exploring the opportunities within the Canadian cultural context – how church is to be church in Canada.

### **Does the Term “Missional Church” Have a Future?**

Perhaps a first question to ask is: Does the term *missional church* have a future? It all depends on how it is used.

My friend Alan Roxburgh has keenly observed that the term “missional church” has moved “from obscurity to banality in eight short years and people still don’t know what it means.”<sup>1</sup> He regards the conversation around missional church as one of the most helpful and hopeful to deal with the current malaise of the North American church that finds itself in a changing postmodern cultural context, and this may explain why so many people have appropriated it.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, there is much misunderstanding of what *missional* seeks to embrace. “Almost everywhere one goes today the word *missional* or the phrase *missional church* is used to describe everything from evangelism to reorganization plans for denominations, to how we make coffee in church basements and denominational meeting rooms.”<sup>3</sup> As one pastor has expressed, “[m]y fear is that we will adopt this language and simply apply it to the same old things we have been doing which we know are failing.”<sup>4</sup> This has been my concern as well, and as has become obvious, many have jumped on the missional bandwagon trying to garner the next new thing to revitalize their congregations without engaging in an intentional process of transformation towards a missional posture.

Yet, whereas many seem to be using *missional* or *missional church* to give currency to their attempts at revitalization, it seems only to be one identifier among a smorgasbord of options. For example, Dan Kimball in *Emergent Church* expresses that one of the characteristics of the emergent church is to be missional, but in taking a closer look at what he presents, he is attempting to bring a new twist to an old paradigm – he may be using the terms *missional* and *emergent*, but all he seems to be doing is reshaping the pragmatic seeker-oriented paradigm for a 20-something generation dissatisfied with present forms of church.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in Brian McLaren’s, *a Generous Orthodoxy*, which is more or less a confession of who he is and

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, The Missional Church, *Theology Matters* (Vol. 10 No 4, Sep/Oct 2004), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>4</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge: Church Leadership in a Time of Change* (Precept, 2000), 28.

<sup>5</sup> See my critique of Dan Kimball’s *The Emerging Church in Congregations* (Vol. 30 No 2, Spring 2004), 41.

where he stands, his subtitle expresses, “Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative . . .”<sup>6</sup> Here the term *missional* is also one adjective among many to describe the kind of Christian McLaren sees himself to be, though admittedly, he gives it a primary place of significance. Others use the term to repackage programs and initiatives to attract and cater to a younger generation who are unreachable through modernistic approaches. Overall, what is being revealed is that there is a misunderstanding of the import or significance of the term.

What needs to be more clearly understood is that the term *missional* is a paradigmatic word, a metanarrative word – a word providing an overarching world view, an overarching frame of reference, an overarching telos. Though it is used as an adjective, it is no mere adjective. For me the term *missional* has a much more foundational purpose than it has come to be used by so many. For me it has the same foundational weight as when we use the term *evangelical* and perhaps even *Christian* to identify ourselves. In this sense, it has the weight of being a noun; it names who I am as I find my identity in Christ Jesus. In some ways the term *evangelical* is no longer comprehensive enough to fully identify who I am as a follower of Jesus Christ. Whereas *evangelical* rightly identifies my submission to the gospel of the kingdom in and through Jesus Christ, *missional* is a more comprehensive, expansive identifier because it connects to an understanding of God who is Trinitarian and God’s purposes which emanate from this Trinitarian relationship. *Missio Dei* and *missional* express the Trinitarian purpose of God for the redemption and reconciliation of humanity, as well as the recreation of all creation under the lordship of Christ. *Missional*, then, is a confession which enfolds and embraces what it means to be *evangelical*, but it finds its center much more deeply in the Trinitarian God. In this way, the term *missional* must be reframed and restated so that we are enabled to more clearly understand and embrace what it is to be Missional Church. Therefore, I believe there is a future for this term, but it requires engaging a missional theology and articulating a missional ecclesiology to unpack its significance.

### **What Does It Mean to be Missional?**

What, then, does it mean to be missional? What does it mean for a community of Christ to engage in God’s missional purposes, to participate with God in God’s missional activity for the redemption of the world? Allow me to present at least three elements which get at the heart of what I believe is at the essence of being missional.

First, being missional has to do with God. It is **God’s** mission. Being missional means that we come to understand that we are called to fully submit every aspect of who we are to God and God’s purposes. As I repeatedly express to students, this mission of God’s is not about us, our comfort, our needs, our etc.; we are called to participate fully in what God desires to accomplish, whether it addresses our individual needs or not. We yield our lives to God so that God may be glorified. We yield our lives to that which God is engaged in. We recognize this understanding in Jesus’ life and ministry – in the Lord’s Prayer where he

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2004.

taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven, holy is your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6: 9-10), and especially in Gethsemane, where he struggled with what God’s redemptive purpose meant for him, yet submitted himself to this purpose, “Abba, Father everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14: 36).

This attitude is also expressed in the film, *The Last Samurai*. In this film, Japan is desirous of entering the industrialized era and the way of the samurai is seen as a threat to progress. Those who influence the emperor advise him that the way of the samurai needs to be eradicated. In one scene, through the conspiring of political forces, the last samurai’s compound is attacked by ninja assassins. The character played by Tom Cruise asks the samurai whether it is the samurai’s enemies or the emperor who seek to kill him. The samurai answers, “It can only be my enemies, for the Emperor only needs to ask and I would give him my life.” This attitude of life being at the full discretion of one’s lord reveals that our participation in the mission of God is not about us, about our well being, about our being blessed. We live at the discretion of the Sovereign Lord.

This is a far cry from the world view of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on individualism, which expresses that it is about us – we are the ones who shape our own destinies, it is about our preservation. Contrary to this Enlightenment ideal is the missional perspective which declares that God “reign[s] and rule[s] over all creation and over all the peoples of the world.”<sup>7</sup> God calls his people to be wholly at his service in the accomplishing of his eschatological purpose.

Second, being missional is to understand that God is the One who initiates and advances mission. This mission is the *mission of God – missio Dei*; it is not an activity initiated by the church wherein the church surmises what needs are to be met in the world to advance the Gospel and then sends out persons on its behalf. As Darrell Guder expresses, “[t]he ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission.”<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Georg F. Vicedom simply comments, “[t]he mission is work that belongs to God. . . . God is the Lord, the One who gives the orders, the Owner, the One who takes care of things. He is the Protagonist in the mission. When we ascribe the mission to God in this way, then it is withdrawn from human whims.”<sup>9</sup> Mission, then, is not what the church initiates, but it is to what the church is called and in what the church is involved. Darrell Guder summarizes:

[M]ission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. *Mission* . . . is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history. God’s mission began with the call of Israel to receive God’s blessings in order to be a blessing to the nations. God’s mission unfolded in the history of God’s people across the centuries recorded in Scripture, and it reached

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Darrell Guder, ed., *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

<sup>9</sup> George F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 5.

its revelatory climax in the incarnation of God's work of salvation in Jesus ministering, crucified and resurrected. God's mission continued then in the sending of the Spirit to call forth and empower the church as the witness to God's good news in Jesus Christ. It continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it moves toward the promised consummation of God's salvation in the *eschaton* . . .<sup>10</sup>

Third, being missional is to understand that the church is not about its own mission, but it only is engaged in mission as the sent people of God. The church is called out of the world in order to be sent into the world as a people participating with God in God's Story and Vision. This Story and Vision of God is the reorienting story for the church and gives the church its reason for being in the world. The church is engaged in mission when it participates with what God is doing in the world in establishing the lordship of Christ over all creation. Just as Jesus Christ did not have a ministry or mission of his own, but was sent by the Father to accomplish the redemptive purpose of God in the world (cf. John 5:19, 7:16-17, 12: 49-50), so too, the church does not set its own agenda for ministry, but is sent into the world by God in the power of the Spirit as Christ's community to be *sign, witness, foretaste, and instrument* of God's purposes and coming reign. Ray S. Anderson undergirds this understanding in stating, "[t]he church has no existence apart from being called into being through [God's] ministry and equipped for it by the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the church to seek a ministry of its own is to deny Christ's ministry and to turn aside to spurious activities that can never justify its own existence or redeem the world."<sup>11</sup>

Vicedom elucidates further:

We cannot speak of the *mission of the church*, as *our mission*. Both the church and the mission have their source in the loving will of God. Therefore we can speak of church and mission always only with the understanding that they are not independent entities. Both are only tools of God, instruments through which God carries out His mission. The church must first in obedience fulfill *His* missionary intention. Only then can she speak of *her* mission, since her mission is then included in the *missio Dei*.<sup>12</sup>

This understanding of mission and the church's relationship to the mission of God provides a new theological understanding of the church in contrast to our pragmatic understandings of the past 20 to 30 years. Rather than the church seeking to establish programs which will attract people to itself, engaging in need surveys, framing its own mission statements, and organizing ministry around those needs, by being "trend-driven"<sup>13</sup> and a vendor of religious services, the church begins to reorient its understanding of itself as a sent community into the

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<sup>10</sup> Guder, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 63.

<sup>12</sup> Vicedom, 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard Kelly, *RetroFuture: Rediscovering Our Roots, Recharting Our Routes* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 17.

world to discern and participate with the redemptive purposes and actions of God in human history. On the church discerning God's action, Vicedom sheds more light:

If it is true that God intends the mission since he Himself carries out the mission, then the church can be God's vessel and tool only if she surrenders herself to His purpose. If she disassociates herself from this concern of God, she becomes disobedient and can no longer be church in the divine sense. *There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world.* Hence the church is not called on to decide whether she will carry on the mission or not. She can only decide for herself whether she wants to be church. She cannot determine when, where, and how mission will be carried out, for the mission is divinely guided . . . . Mission, as the business of God, implies that He lays claim to make use of all His believers exactly as He wishes, in order to impart His love to all . . . through His believers. God makes this claim clear by first achieving the mission *through Himself*. The church can only follow in achieving what God has already done and is doing. She can only point to what He will do. Thus mission is based on the activity of God Himself.<sup>14</sup>

### **A Missional Ecclesiology**

Indeed there are more characteristics which give shape to an understanding of what it means to be missional, but in grasping these three elements we begin to see that the missional church is indeed a different kind of *ekklesia* than has been lived out in society over the past number of decades in the North American context. Whereas, within Constantianism and modernity the church attempted to rely upon its privileged position in culture, as sponsor of the culture through Christendom in which it shared power with culture, participated in the agenda of culture, and was regarded as essential to the outworking of culture, by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century the Christian faith was of little relevance within Western culture – the church within Christendom has run its course; Christendom is over.<sup>15</sup> However, as Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch note, “[w]hile in reality we are in a post-Christendom context, the Western church still operates for the most part in a Christendom mode. Constantine, it seems, is still the emperor of our imaginations.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the missional community is called to be an alternate society within culture demonstrating what human life, relationships, and community look like under the reign of God. Though the missional community is in relationship to culture, “the reason for mission comes from somewhere else”<sup>17</sup> – from its rootedness in the mission of Christ.

In a recent article in the *Chicago Tribune*, the evangelical fascination with fitting into and its ministry agenda being driven by culture made the front page. The article stated that “[t]he influence of evangelicals is everywhere in today's society, according to Alan Wolfe, a sociologist at Boston College, but that is because evangelicals are being influenced by

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<sup>14</sup> Vicedom, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen Publishers, 2003), 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

popular culture, not the other way around. ‘I see them not as shapers of American culture, I see popular culture shaping them.’<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the missional church is not so much a community that is contrary to culture, as it is the missional community of God in the world,, situated in a particular cultural context, called to be *sign, witness, foretaste, and instrument* of the purposes and reign of God within that cultural context. The missional community participates in God’s purposes, not by being relevant to the culture, but by being, in Stanley Hauerwas’ terms, “a community of character”<sup>19</sup> within culture. Likewise, John Howard Yoder expresses that “the church is God’s people gathered as . . . a people, gathered to do business in His name, to find what it means here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God’s promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the missional community as a sign, witness, foretaste and instrument of God’s purposes and reign,

. . . is a called community of God’s people which points beyond itself to the promised fulfillment of the coming reign of God. . . . is a charismatic Spirit-filled community which manifests the first-fruits of God’s reign within its common life and shared ministry. . . . [and] is a messianic Christ-formed community which actualizes the peace and reconciliation of God’s reign in the midst of the concrete circumstances of life.<sup>21</sup>

Roxburgh addresses these public characteristics of the missional church as well in stating that “local congregations are [called to be] embodiments of where God is calling all creation.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Inagrace Dietterich summarizes this best:

The mission of the church is to be a source of radical hope, to witness to the new identity and vision, the new way of life, which has become a social reality in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The persistent problem is not how to keep the church from withdrawing from the world, but how to keep the world from distracting the church from its purpose of cultivating the people of God. As a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God’s reconciling love and forgiveness, the church makes Jesus Christ visible in the world. The church is a social reality that offers the resources, the practices, and the supports to cultivate a people of truth, peace, wholeness and holiness.<sup>23</sup>

Those who participate in this community also have a different understanding of *election*. Lesslie Newbigin, in returning from the mission field to his native England only to discover that England had become a mission field itself, gave much attention to a renewed

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<sup>18</sup> Dahleen Glanton, Showbiz has a star in Jesus: Religion sells-and sells as Christians fuel a \$4 billion entertainment industry, *Chicago Tribune* (Sunday, November 12, 2006), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 30-31.

<sup>21</sup> The Center for Parish Development, The Ministry of the Center for Parish Development, *Transformation* (Vol. VIII no 2, Fall 2002), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Church*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Inagrace T. Dietterich, *Cultivating Missional Communities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 5.

understanding of this doctrine. He came to realize that election was not so much the rescue of humanity from damnation, as it was a calling “. . . to submit their lives to the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ *for the sake of the world*.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the missional church is a called-out community of humanity redeemed through and identified with Jesus Christ and participates with God in bringing to completion God’s intended purpose for creation, rather than being a gathering of persons seeking to have their needs met in Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Canadian Multicultural Setting**

But how does such a community of God’s people live out its calling within the Canadian multicultural setting? To engage this question, we need first to gain some understanding of the nature of Canadian multiculturalism (or at least I do since I have not critically analyzed it in quite some time.)

First, in understanding what culture is, George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder express that “culture consists of the integrated systems of beliefs, values, and behaviors held by a people. Culture frames our human existence. We cannot know ourselves apart from possessing a particular perspective. . . . [The] interaction between human society and physical world represents the creation of what we think of culture.”<sup>26</sup>

Multiculturalism then is a collective of cultures that coexist with one another in one political and geographic context. These cultures exhibit a variety of systems of beliefs, values and behaviors creating an environment in which numerous cultures interact. The ensuing multicultural milieu then is one that is pluralistic.

Therefore, Canada, with no single integrated system of beliefs, values and behaviors, is indeed a country of diversity. Back in 1995 it was stated that about 10% of the Canadian adult population were visible minorities. Canada’s population diversity encompassed Aboriginal people, the founding British and French groups as well as “. . . large numbers of Germans, Italians, Dutch, Ukrainian, Chinese, Black, and Indo-Pakistani people, among others.”<sup>27</sup> By 2001 this diversity increased. The 2001 census reported over 200 different ethnic origins and “also found that 18.4% of the population was born outside of Canada – the highest proportion in 70 years – and that immigrants were increasingly from Asia. The visible minority population accounted for 13.4% of the population, up from 4.7% in 1981<sup>28</sup> and 10% in 1995.

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<sup>24</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Church*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 53.

<sup>27</sup> Victoria M. Esses and R.C. Gardner, Multiculturalism in Canada: Context and Current Status, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* (July 1996). [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3717/is\\_199607/ai\\_n8749492](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3717/is_199607/ai_n8749492). Downloaded on November 9, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Dewing and Marc Leman, Canadian Multiculturalism, *Parliamentary Information and Research Service* (revised March 16, 2006). <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/936-e.htm>. Downloaded on November 9, 2006.



According to a 2003 ethnic diversity survey published by Statistics Canada, the proportion of people over 15 years old with British, French, and/or Canadian ancestry comprised only 46% of the population.<sup>29</sup> This was the first time, I believe, that the historical ethnicities of British, French and Canadian dropped below 50%, with other ethnicities making up the majority of the population at 54%.

Yet, in the Canadian cultural context, multiculturalism is not only a matter of empirical data revealing the diversity of racial and ethnic minorities; it is also an ideological value. There are primarily three approaches in the world for dealing with the presence of numerous cultures within a nation. The German *Leitkultur* or *Leading Culture* permits ethnic communities to have an identity of their own, but they at least support the core values of the leading culture. The *melting pot* approach of the United States encourages immigrants to become amalgamated into the dominant culture. The third approach, as in Canada, is *multiculturalism* wherein immigrants are encouraged to preserve their cultures while peacefully interacting with other cultures within the same nation.<sup>30</sup>

Multiculturalism, then, in Canadian policy “consists of a relatively coherent set of ideas and ideals pertaining to the celebration of Canada’s cultural diversity.”<sup>31</sup> In July 1988, Canada became the first country in the world to pass a national multiculturalism law. The *Multiculturalism Act* “acknowledged multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in the decision-making process of the federal government.”<sup>32</sup> This was to have quite a bearing upon how Canadians related to one another. This Act

sought to preserve, enhance and incorporate cultural differences into the functioning of Canadian society, while ensuring equal access and full participation for all Canadians in the social, political, and economic spheres. It also focused on the eradication of racism and removal of discriminatory barriers as being incompatible with Canada’s commitment to human rights.<sup>33</sup>

Multiculturalism as some understand it is different cultural and ethnic groups being enabled to do whatever they choose, but in actuality the Act has quite a different focus. “Policy-making in Canada stresses active dialogue between cultural groups, active attempts at creating community cohesion, and the acceptance of overarching Canadian identity.”<sup>34</sup> This understanding has importance in dialoguing about the future of the missional church in the Canadian context.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Of this 46%, 21% reporting British-only ancestry, 10% French-only, 8% Canadian-only (the ethnic identity of ‘Canadian’ was introduced in the 1996 census), and 7% were a mix of these three origins.

<sup>30</sup> Multiculturalism, *All Experts.com*, <http://experts.about.com/e/m/mu/multiculturalism.htm>. Downloaded November 9, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Dewing and Leman.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Giddens, Misunderstanding Multiculturalism, *Comment is Free* (October 14, 2006). [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/anthony\\_giddens/2006/10/tony\\_giddens.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/anthony_giddens/2006/10/tony_giddens.html). Downloaded November 9, 2006.

As a result of such a political initiative many have applauded Canada “. . . as the first immigrant country to become thoroughly pluralistic,”<sup>35</sup> However, attitudes vary as to the degree persons are supportive of a multicultural society. Though generally there is an acceptance of the diversity of Canada, there has been an increased expressed fear “that the multiculturalism policy is promoting too much diversity at the expense of unity . . . . Critics say the policy is divisive because it emphasizes what is different, rather than values that are Canadian. Canadian culture and symbols, it is felt, are being discarded in the effort to accommodate other cultures.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet there are those who defend Canada’s approach to multiculturalism and state that it enables immigrants to “not have to choose between preserving their cultural heritage and participating in Canadian society. Rather, they can do both.”<sup>37</sup> As recently as October 2003, polls by the Centre for Research and Information (CRIC) indicate that the majority of Canadians (54%) stated that multiculturalism made them feel proud to be Canadian, which rose to 66% for Canadians between the ages of 18 and 30.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Canadian Multi-Religious Setting**

Canada is not only diverse culturally, it is also is multi-religious. In the 2001 census, 77% of Canadians identified themselves as Christians, 17% as atheist, agnostic, or no religion, 1.1% as Jewish, 2.0% as Islamic, and 2.9% making up other faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism.<sup>39</sup> But this does not necessarily indicate that Christianity is healthy in the Canadian cultural context. Since 1901, those identifying themselves as Christian has dropped by over 26%. Also, being Christian, or for that matter being of another religious group does, not translate into regular worship attendance. In 2001, only 20% stated that they attend worship on a weekly basis, and 43% indicated that they have not been to a religious service in 12 months.<sup>40</sup> The 2001 census also revealed that since the last census, Christianity grew by only 1.5%, whereas, those in other faith groups grew by 72.5%, and those with no religious affiliation grew by 44.2%.<sup>41</sup> In terms of actual numbers, whereas the Canadian population grew by 2.6 million persons in 10 years, Christianity grew by about 350, 000, Non-Christian groups grew by 794,000, and those indicating no religious affiliation grew by about 503,000 – Christianity is losing ground.<sup>42</sup>

In spite of the census data, Reginald Bibby, sociologist and professor at the University of Lethbridge is one who raises concern about the empirical reality of multiculturalism. Bibby

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<sup>35</sup> Pat Duffy Hutcheon, *Multiculturalism in Canada*, Paper presented at the World Congress of the International Sociological Association in Montreal in July 1998. <http://patduffyhutcheon.com/Papers%20and%20Presentations/Multiculturalism%20in%20Canada.htm> . Downloaded on November 9, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> B. A. Robinson, *Religious Similarities and Differences Between Americans and Canadians* (December 15, 2005), [http://www.religioustolerance.org/canus\\_rel.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/canus_rel.htm). Downloaded on November 17, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> B. A. Robinson, *Religion Data from the 2001 Canadian Census*, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/can\\_rel0.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/can_rel0.htm). Downloaded on November 17, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> B. A. Robinson, *Canadian Data About Christianity: Growths and Losses from 1991 to 2001*, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/can\\_rel1.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/can_rel1.htm). Downloaded on November 17, 2006

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

argues that engaging multiculturalism politically does not take into account “just how multicultural the country is; there is no careful delineation of the proportions of the whole that the individual mosaic tiles comprise.”<sup>43</sup> He notes that this concern also relates to Canada being perceived as a multi-religious society. In this multi-religious mosaic each religious group is given equal status on the basis of social construction and multicultural policy, though the empirical data reveal that the historical religious groups of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are still dominant. For Bibby this creates problems for how we engage our cultural and religious diversity.

Multiculturalism, grounded in the assumption rather than data, and legitimized by proclamation rather than academic consensus, is clearly a political social construction. However, once in place, it tends to be seen as reality and treated as ‘what is real’ by religious groups, the public, and academics. As such, it becomes in effect ‘reified’ – regarded as a truism that cannot be evaluated. Because multiculturalism has received the sanction of government and the legal system, one asks questions in the area at one’s peril. In a multicultural-oriented society, one measure of people is where they stand on a battery of lifestyle, religious, gender, and sexual issues. Simply to raise the question of ‘how multicultural’ Canada really is, let alone challenge the empirical accuracy of the concept itself, can lead to the accusation that one is racist, Euro-centric, or simply out-of-date.<sup>44</sup>

In relation to religious diversity, Bibby reveals that the majority of Canadians still list “Christian” as their religious identity.<sup>45</sup>

The point that Bibby seems to make is that Canada is not an equally-proportioned mosaic particularly in terms of religious identity. Rather than there being a significant increase in the proportion of other faiths, there seems to be an increase in cultural diversity within Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, Bibby argues that Canada reveals more of a *mosaic madness* advocating pluralism and relativism which hinders any kind of nation-building. Canadian pluralism leads Canadians to express little loyalty to anything except to a somewhat “tenuous willingness to coexist.” As a result

religion in Canada is not very aggressive nor is it expected to be very demanding. Most Canadians have no strong convictions about religion, which at best has only a marginal place in their lives. The result is that when religious groups speak out about public issues, whether Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, or conservative Protestants, their statements . . . hardly sound prophetic.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Multiculturalism in Canada: A Methodologically Inadequate Political Virtue*, *Diskus* (Vol. 5, 1999). <http://web.uni-marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/bibby.html>. Downloaded on November 9, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Bibby’s findings are drawn from responses to Statistics Canada questionnaires asking “What is your religion?”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Harry Antonides, *Multiculturalism: The Road to Nowhere*, *Christianity.ca* (2005). <http://www.christianity.ca/news/commentary/2005/05.001.html>. Downloaded on November 9, 2006.

And so, Bibby believes that religion as a whole in Canada lacks authority and has lost its ability to contribute to the development of social cohesion. He concludes: “Sadly, religion, rather than decrying the excesses of individualism and relativism, has tended to embrace them. It therefore has lost both its message and its vocal chords.”<sup>48</sup>

In continuing to try to alter this reality through his most recent work, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, Bibby proposes that the church just needs to make itself better. However, John G. Stackhouse Jr. raises the critique that Bibby only adds to the dilemma, rather than resolving it. In his 2002 review of this book, Stackhouse writes:

Bibby finds fully half of the Canadian population harboring distinctly “unconventional” ideas about religious matters, such as “spirituality” being defined as simply a “greater power” or a “matter relating only to your inner self or soul”; or religious knowledge being defined as “a knowledge of all living things seen and unseen”; or religious behavior being defined as “being accepting of others and one’s self” while “nurturing the needs of their soul.”

If this is the sort of thing that half of the Canadian population is looking for, then no amount of improvement is going to get them into a Mennonite or Pentecostal or Presbyterian church on Sunday morning. And to the extent that churches cater to such values and ideas, they will be departing from Christianity.

Thus the Bibby thesis actually presents a dilemma rather than a solution. Bibby himself recognizes that the most vital Christian group (Conservative Protestant) is also, because of its orthodoxy, the least inclined to meet the expectations of this unconventional half of the population.<sup>49</sup>

It seems that the church in Canada finds itself in an impossible position. Is a missional perspective able to point us to a different way of engagement?

### **Recent Trend in Taking Religion Seriously in Canada**

Though the practice of religion in Canada may be diminishing, there seems to be an increased interest in religion amongst academics, especially religion and culture. For example, TWU’s own Jens Zimmerman recently received a \$500K grant to investigate the meaning and implications of a resurgence in religion, which recognizes that in the post 9-11 world, the West is experiencing an identity crisis which can only be resolved by rediscovering our religious roots for redefining our identity.<sup>50</sup> Zimmerman indicated that he is looking at “. . . the resurgence of religion as legitimate public knowledge, which has been marginalized since the 1960s.”<sup>51</sup> This resurgence is also evidenced through such conferences as McGill’s gathering of three hundred scholars to discuss *Pluralism, Religion and Public Policy* during October 2002. One of the speakers at this event was Chief Justice of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., citing Reginald W. Bibby from *Mosaic Madness: Pluralism Without a Cause*

<sup>49</sup> John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, *Books & Culture* (November/December 2002), 20-21.

<sup>50</sup> Erin Mussolum, *Religion and culture: TWU scholar awarded \$500K Canada Research Chair*, Trinity Western University News (Friday, September 8, 2006), <http://www.twu.ca/news/view-specific.aspx?newsID=518>. Downloaded on November 17, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Supreme Court of Canada Beverley McLachlin who stated that, “we have come to a fuller appreciation of the intrinsic connection between respecting religious conscience and attending to the inherent dignity of all persons.”<sup>52</sup>

However, whereas some may argue this is evidence for the need to reestablish Christianity as the dominant faith of the land,<sup>53</sup> this trend of resurgence of religion is not a basis for reestablishing Christendom in the Canadian context, or elsewhere for that matter. Rather there seems to be an openness to recognize the value of religion in society and to integrate multi-religious perspectives within the Canadian multicultural context.

### **Multiculturalism and Christendom**

Whether one talks about the nature of multiculturalism or the multi-religiousness of Canada as either social construct or empirical reality, it is evident that the Canadian cultural environment in which the church exists is a pluralistic and secular one. The Christian story which once was normative in society is no longer the only narrative, nor the primary narrative – even among those who identify themselves as Christian.<sup>54</sup> Some, however, may point to the majority of persons who still identify themselves as “Christian” as providing a rationale for instituting a resurgence of Christendom in Canada. However, that would be short-sighted. The point is Christendom has long seen its day in Canada. There is nothing to be gained in restoring a form of the church that stood in contrast to the Gospel for too long.

Christendom, with its syncretistic collusion with culture has never been all that successful in truly transforming the lives of persons in the way of Christ anyway – it presented the Christian story in a distorted manner in which power and control were heralded for a kingdom in this world, rather than a kingdom that is not of this world. For almost four centuries the church lived out a different story in contrast to the Roman culture. Christendom came into being through the Constantinian shift of the church and its story was intertwined with the agenda of culture. Rodney Clapp articulates.

[W]ith the Constantinian shift the church decided to derive its significance through association with the identity and purposes of the state. In the pre-Constantinian setting, the church saw the state as having a preservative function. It was to serve God by encouraging the good and restraining evil, i.e., to serve peace, to preserve the social cohesion in which the leaven of the gospel can build the church and render the

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<sup>52</sup> *Scholars Discuss Religion's Place in Society*, The McGill Tribune (October 16, 2002), <http://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/2002/10/16/News/Scholars.Discuss.Religions.Place.In.Society-297819.shtml>. Downloaded on November 17, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Antonides, where he expresses four objections to multiculturalism and the need to reestablish a Christian culture. He forgets the lessons of a failed Christendom when he laments that “we cannot say that largely ‘Christian’ Western democracies are superior to other cultures. To make such a claim is now seen as cultural imperialism that is responsible for the injustice and oppression of the past.”

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Murray in *Post-Christendom* shares the story “of a teenager in a London school who hears the Christmas story for the first time. He is amazed and captivated by it, and at the end of the lesson asked his teacher, ‘Why did they give the baby a swear word for his name?’” Cited in *Towards a New Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* [http://www.urc.org.uk/catch\\_vision/report\\_2005/spirituality.htm](http://www.urc.org.uk/catch_vision/report_2005/spirituality.htm). Downloaded November 17, 2006.

present age more tolerable. All this made the state important, but hardly central. The church considered itself, not the state, to be carrying the meaning of history. In the words of the letter to the Ephesians, it is “through the church” that “the wisdom of God in its rich variety” is “made known to the rulers and authorities” (3:10).

As theologian John Howard Yoder observes, the most “pertinent fact” of the Constantinian shift was not that the church was no longer persecuted but that the two visible realities of church and world were fused. There was, in a sense, no longer anything to call “world” – state, economy, art, rhetoric, superstition and war were all baptized.<sup>55</sup>

And so with this shift there was also a fundamental shift in terms of the question of allegiance. Clapp states that “The question is no longer ‘How can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?’ but now becomes ‘How can we adjust the church’s expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?’ Thus the ethical requirements of the church were adapted to the level of what might be called ‘respectable unbelief.’”<sup>56</sup>

However, since the Enlightenment, with the advent of the individual as authority and knowledge being empirical, this hegemony of the church has been eroding. The church has been marginalized to the edges of relevance in society, including the Canadian context, and no longer has a real voice in public affairs – faith and church have been relegated to the private spheres of life. George Hunsberger notes that for many this reality is regarded as crisis, rather than an opportunity for reframing how we are to be the community of Christ in the world. He notes that

if . . . the church is no longer looked to for legitimization or moral underpinning, we have scarcely begun to live as though that were true . . . The Christendom experiment has run its course and is over, but our images and instincts are still formed by its memory. We play out the church’s routine as though the concerns of the church and the quests of the culture go hand-in-glove. . . . The rude awakening breaking in on us is that whatever such connection there may have been in the past, it is vanishing.

We are caught between a Constantinian Christendom that has ended and to which we cannot return and the culture’s relegation of the church to the private realm, which is untenable if we have understood rightly that the gospel is news that has relevance to the public life of the whole world.<sup>57</sup>

What then is the place of Christendom in relation to the multiculturalism of Canada? Simply put, it no longer has a place. Don Posterski argues, there is no longer a strong Christian consensus about attitudes and behaviors. The Christian assumptions that undergirded society

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<sup>55</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 25.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> George R. Hunsberger, *The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America*, in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, eds. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 17.

are no longer deemed relevant at best, or are no longer there at worst. There may still be a belief in God, but there is no allegiance to the ways of God.<sup>58</sup> Christianity in the form of Christendom has run its course and particularly, within a multicultural context, whether socially constructed or described empirically, Christianity has seemingly lost its relevance.

Alan Roxburgh suggests that “the majority of the emerging generation in Canada is growing into adulthood with no memory of the Christian narrative.”<sup>59</sup> Whereas in the past, Christianity within Christendom was able to set the agenda for culture, but within a multicultural context room is made for a pluralistic agenda. Roxburgh notes that “the dislodging of Christian life in Canada from the mainstream to the margins has been astoundingly rapid.”<sup>60</sup> In this pluralistic context other groups and religions now participate in agenda setting, perhaps even primarily. In fact, in reaction to the coercive power of Christendom over the centuries since Constantine, the pluralistic agenda actively refuses to listen to the Christian voice – suspicious that Christianity will seek to assert its own agenda and re-exert its privileged status and place of power in society. As Christianity comes to recognize that it has become irrelevant or marginalized, then it must discover new ways of being in a culture.

It is in facing this challenge of how we are to be the church in a culture which is distrustful of Christianity, that missional language has promise. The church cannot continue on with business as usual – being church within the context of Christendom. As Roxburgh concludes, “we need to fundamentally rethink the frameworks and paradigms that have shaped the church over the last half-century. The basic stance of denominations and congregations must be transformed to that of missionaries in their own culture. This requires far more than adjustment. It calls for a radically new kind of church.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Implications for the Future of the Missional Church in the Multicultural Setting of Canada**

In light of the above, I propose that we must look to reframing our understanding of being Christian in Canada in light of a missional paradigm. Such an understanding of being a missional church, as the basis for reframing how the Christian community is to be church, is what needs to occupy our theological engagement so that we can begin to discern and enact how we will now be the missional community of God in the world, and particularly in the Canadian multicultural context.

I suggest at least two directions or implications for the future of the missional church in Canada: Making space for the Gospel and being servant community within the Canadian multicultural setting.

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<sup>58</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today's World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 19-25.

<sup>59</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Church*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

## Making Space for the Gospel: Living Out Our Story

The missional church has a future as long as it is engaged in making space for the Gospel in culture. We can no longer assume that space will be made for the Gospel in society. Just because Christianity is still the stated religion of the majority of Canadians it does not mean that Christianity can coerce their way into the lives of Canadians. Christianity can no longer swagger onto the scene like John Wayne (or Lorne Greene, to offer a Canadian metaphor) and expect the other cultural actors to provide a space for the Gospel – as if “swaggering” ever made space for the Gospel of the kingdom (though it may have had success in making space for a *heteros* gospel).

In being a missional people, participating with God in God’s redemptive mission, the missional church sees itself as a sign and witness of an alternate culture. But it makes this difference known not by abusing, nor dominating those of other cultures, as in the taking charge, control seeking ways of Christendom. Rather, the missional church realizes that in a pluralistic culture we are one voice among many and we have to earn the right to be heard – in fact if we demand our once held place of privilege, we will not be invited into the conversation. So if we want to be taken seriously, we must take the voices of other religious and non-religious persons and groups seriously and extend respect and acceptance within our Canadian culture.

How do we go about doing this?

First, it involves rediscovering, or perhaps even learning for the first time, our Story – otherwise we are in danger of presenting a *heteros* Story. Within the pluralistic multicultural and multi-religious environment of Canada, there are numerous narratives which give meaning to persons and guide the way they live. If the voice of the Christian community is to be clearly heard, the people of God must once again rediscover what makes them the people of God – we must come to know our own Story.

So much of our Story has been wrapped up in the culture that we have forgotten that we live in a Story which is not of this world, but presents an alternative Story to all other stories – a Story, which is centered in Jesus, not just as Saviour of western Christians, but as Saviour of all humanity, a Story which when clearly lived out and expressed provides a way for persons to become reconciled with God and for creation to be restored. There are numerous praxis-oriented approaches which can lead us to re-engage the Story which shapes us.

Second, as we rediscover and re-engage this Story which shapes us, we engage the world in a different way. Being missional involves a way of being in the world that I think has been attributed to St. Francis of Assisi – “wherever you go preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words.” Before we speak our Story, we must live out our Story. If our narrative is ever to be a metanarrative for all cultures within the Canadian multicultural context, the reality of this Story must be evident in the way we live with one another in our own church and cultural contexts, and also in our engagement with persons and groups in other cultural and religious contexts.



Does this mean that we are no longer to engage in evangelism? Yes and No. Yes, we are no longer to engage in approaches to evangelism which show disregard for our Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or non-religious neighbours. Rather than expressing our Story, our narrative as a competing narrative, we must engage in ways of being and conversing that makes way for the Gospel as salt and light within the narratives of other cultural and religious groups.

What might this look like? I propose that we are called to walk among them, with them, alongside of them, supporting and encouraging them in their growth and development as human beings by engaging them the way Jesus would. This is not just a “reverse-psychology” tactic, but rather an engagement that offers genuine respect and acceptance of them as persons – beliefs and all. This is also not an underhanded subversive approach which hides our real motives behind false actions. We are called as God’s missional people to love them as God loves them. We are called as God’s missional people to seek their well-being as God seeks to make them whole. Afterall, this is not our ministry; it is Christ’s ministry, the Father’s mission. Our Father in heaven desires “all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2: 4).

This is also not some subversive, bait and switch approach to evangelism. Rather, it is seeing and treating our neighbour as persons of worth, as having dignity, as being created in the image of God. Since God’s love is extended towards them, dare we do anything else except extend the same kind of love that Christ Jesus did and would do?

If there is anything subversive in this, it is the moving of the Spirit of God. We make space for the Gospel as we make space for others in our lives. As we make room for others in our lives, we do not come to them with our agendas, but we are open to the agenda that God has for them and us in our encountering one another. As we make room for others in our lives – our lives which are open and yielded to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit has opportunity to touch the lives of others and draw them to himself. This drawing by the Spirit is not a drawing to enter into Christendom or even “Christianity,” but a drawing to yield to the one who is completely human, wholly human – God, who took on human flesh in Jesus Christ, who identifies with us, who touches us at the core of our being. The Spirit is given opportunity when we make space for the Gospel, to enter into the lives of others who would be otherwise closed to God’s love and purposes. The Spirit is released into the relationships we are in when we make space for the gospel, but we grieve the Spirit when we attempt to shape encounters by setting our narrative, our Story, in competition with theirs, in ways we are comfortable, in ways in which we maintain control, rather than yielding to the leading of the Spirit, who changes others and us as we are open to encounter others.

I first came across this story of making space for the Gospel in a UK Bible Society brochure, but also more recently read it in Frost and Hirsch’s *The Shape of Things to Come*. Brock Bingamann was seeking to plant a church within the city limits of San Francisco where there was little hope of traditional church plants succeeding. Instead he opened the Subterranean Shoe Room and sold new and retro (restored second-hand) shoes. Often, people who visited his shop would express that they did not know what kind of shoes to buy. Brock’s standard response was, “Tell me a little about yourself and I’ll tell you what kind of shoes you need.” People would begin sharing themselves, their stories and he would then know what kind of

shoes were perfect for them. If someone asked, “how many have come to Jesus?” the answer would be none, but Brock is developing relationships with gay couples, Marxist professors, aging hippies and bohemian artists that an ordinary seeker-style church could not even dream of. Brock is making space for the Gospel, where he as a carrier of the Gospel creates opportunity for the Spirit by developing relationships with people who come to his store to buy shoes.<sup>62</sup>

Making space for the Gospel is realizing that God is active in the world to accomplish his purposes – we, as God’s people, as God’s missional community, are called to participate with what God is doing, rather than trying to reshape God’s activity in our own image.

This trying to reshape God’s purposes is what took place with the prophet Jonah. He knew that God’s judgment is for the sake of repentance, and since he despised the Assyrian Ninevites, he chose to go the other way – away from Nineveh and towards Tarshish – so that the Ninevites might not have an opportunity to repent. Even when Jonah’s prophetic course was corrected, he did not display a missional heart – he became angry with God, even considered God’s act of relenting from judgment when Nineveh repented as evil. Jonah was not open to being a part of God’s missional purpose in the world, but rather tried to exert his own biases and hatred onto the situation.

In making space for the Gospel we are a people who are yielding to where God is leading us, no matter where that may be – so that our open, engagement of those who are our neighbours might witness the reality of the Gospel of the kingdom and the reality of Jesus as the one who embodies the kingdom.

Don Posterski suggests that we make space for the Gospel in this way when we take the risk to accept and appreciate those who are not Christian. He describes this not as a formula but a framework for receiving and responding to people God brings into our lives. He states, “when *acceptance* is the attitude and when *appreciation* for what is good in people is expressed, followers of Jesus are in a position to *influence* those who have not yet accepted Christ and his teachings.”<sup>63</sup>

In these ways as a missional community we encourage one another to make space for the Gospel in the world; space where the Spirit of God is released to engage the lives of those God has led us beside.

### Being Servant Community: Creating a Culture of the Kingdom

The missional church has a future as long as it seeks to be a servant community in culture. As stated above multiculturalism policy in Canada encourages active dialogue between cultural groups and active attempts at creating community cohesion. In engaging in this spirit of multiculturalism, in the manner expressed above, the missional church has the opportunity to demonstrate an alternative culture among other cultures in the Canadian social context. We become servant community in culture, in the manner Christ came “not to be

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<sup>62</sup> Frost and Hirsch, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Posterski, 77.

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). As the missional community rediscovers its story rooted in God’s Story and Vision, and lives out this Story in society, the church discovers that its “. . . missional identity . . . is linked to the biblical accounting of the kingdom of God and the ways in which God covenants with people in order to call forth an alternative community of the kingdom.”<sup>64</sup> In that Jesus embodied the presence of the kingdom in an active servanthood (cf. John 13: 1-17; Philippians 2: 5-11), so too the missional community lives out its life in the culture of the kingdom as servant community.

What does this mean?

As Stanley Hauerwas iterates, “the church serves the world by giving the world the means to see itself truthfully.”<sup>65</sup> The missional church in choosing not to exert dominance over other cultures, but in coming alongside and engaging other cultures within the Canadian setting, enabling these cultures to see themselves in light of the reality of the Gospel of the kingdom, places them in a different mode that if it was necessary to protect themselves in a defensive mode against a culture that chooses to control and dominate them. The church as missional community is so to live in the world as a witness to the kingdom which brings peace and wholeness to every context that yields itself to it. In this sense the missional community through its engagement with other cultures, as alternative culture, acts as a mirror for other cultures – a mirror which helps cultures to see who they are apart from being submitted to a kingdom or culture under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Hauerwas adds that “Christians are involved in politics, but it is a politics of the kingdom that reveals the insufficiency of all politics based on coercion and falsehood and finds the true source of power in servanthood rather than dominion.”<sup>66</sup> To this insight of Hauerwas’ I would state that the culture of the kingdom also reveals the insufficiency of all other cultures – but it is an insufficiency that is revealed not through dominance, but through the missional community’s engagement of other cultures as servant community.

In another sense, as missional community, their servanthood is not directed to the world at all. Rather, as the sent community of God in the world, their servanthood is to God – God is the one whom the missional community serves. It is not the needs of the world, nor the needs of pluralistic cultures that set the agenda of the missional church’s service in the world. Rather, as the community of Christ, continuing the ministry of Christ Jesus in the world, this community participates with God and God’s mission in the world.<sup>67</sup> God sets the agenda for engaging the various cultures within the Canadian social context; God sets the agenda for his redemptive mission to Canada’s multi-cultures, an agenda which the missional community is called to discern and participate in, in order, not merely to be sign of God’s kingdom and reign, but also the instrument of God to bring about his purposes within the cultures. As the

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<sup>64</sup> Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge*, 79.

<sup>65</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 101-102.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>67</sup> I am indebted to Ray S. Anderson for this understanding of the church’s mission in the world, as servanthood to the Father. Anderson expresses this understanding more clearly in, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) and *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God’s People* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

missional church serves God in this way, by participating with God in God's mission – they are set free to be the community which lives out the culture of the kingdom in full display of all other cultures and religious groups. The missional church, in serving God in this way, does not find it necessary to draw attention to itself, but draws the attention of cultural groups to Jesus Christ, to the Spirit, to the Father, to the Trinitarian God – in the same spirit of John the Baptist in relation to Jesus: “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30).

It is in the missional church's discerning not only what God is calling them to do, but also a discerning where the activity of God is within a particular cultural group, that the missional community steps out in obedience to God's mission, in service to God, to serve other cultures. This serving cultures, by serving God, requires the missional community to be a servant community, listening to and engaging other cultures so that what is revealed in the interaction between a missional community submitted to the culture of the kingdom and another culture, is the reality of a transformed life, a new life, a different life, a whole life that is only possible under the lordship of Christ. In this way the missional community participates in being an instrument in fostering the submission of all peoples to Christ Jesus, so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 10-11). In this engagement of kingdom culture with other cultures, the missional community, as sign, witness, foretaste and instrument effectively reveals the essence of what the lordship of Christ means within various cultural contexts.

Similar to making space for the Gospel, the missional community acting as servant community in the world enables cultures to have ears to hear and eyes to see how their life would be transformed in light of the culture of the kingdom/reign of God. This is the future of the missional church in Canada.

These represent only two directions or implications of the future of the missional church in the multicultural setting of Canada. Further dialogue, further engagement I am sure will reveal more insights and ways of being the missional community of God in Canada, but I believe there is enough here to begin a critical discussion.

## **Conclusion**

What then can be said about the future of the missional church in Canada's multicultural setting? For sure it means creating distance between how we have understood church within the context of Christendom and the way we understand what it means to be a community that is participating with God in what God wants to accomplish in drawing the Canadian people, in all their diversity, into a redemptive relationship with himself. For sure it means, not drawing attention to ourselves – it is not about building the kingdom by building the church through better programs, better preaching, better buildings. It is about being available to however God chooses to use us as a community in fulfilling his redemptive purpose in the Canadian context. It involves our developing new structures and frameworks as church communities which do not advance our own interests, our own ministry agendas, but rather are involved in discerning God's missional activity and prayerfully sensing the leading of the Spirit to develop innovative ministry in light of what is discerned. It is sensing the heart and

passion of God for the diverse cultural and religious groups of Canada, so that God may use us as yielded communities to effect his redemptive purpose of “making disciples of all the *ethne* of Canada, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Christ commands” (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). In this way the people groups of Canada will come to realize that Christ Jesus is with them, even to the very end of the age” (cf. Matthew 28:20).