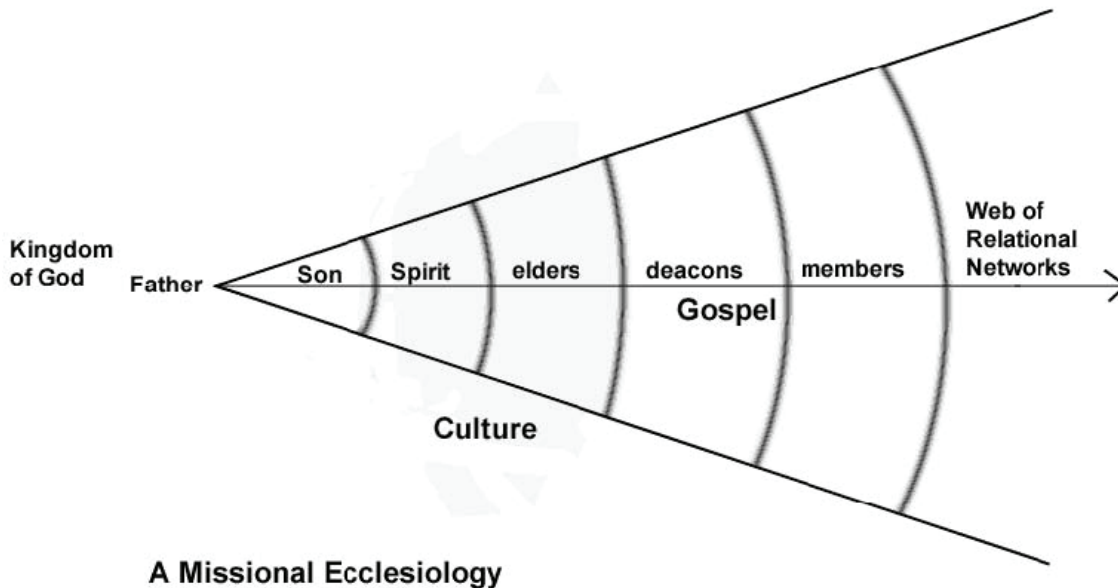


05: MISSIONAL CHURCH



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... Ephesians 5:25

The church is the community of Christians for all time who have been loved and saved by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:25). The church includes the people of the Old Testament (i.e. Deuteronomy 4:10; Acts 7:38; Hebrews 2:12 cf. Psalm 22:22). In every church, there are people who are not Christians (Matthew 13:24-30), including wolves sent by Satan to lead people astray (Acts 20:29-30). While it is possible for Christians to know who else is a Christian (i.e. the frequent references to Christian brothers and sisters), ultimately only the Lord knows exactly every person who is and is not a Christian (2 Timothy 2:19).

SHOULD ALL CHRISTIANS BE VITALLY INVOLVED IN A LOCAL CHURCH?

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Old and New Testaments were written to communities of God's people who regularly gathered together for such things as teaching, fellowship, worship, etc. The Bible is clear that every Christian is a part of the larger church body and is expected to participate in the life of a local church with the gift(s) God has given him or her (1 Corinthians 12:1-31).

It is therefore a sin for someone who claims to be a Christian not to be actively loving his or her Christian brothers and sisters (1 John 1:7, 3:17-18, 4:21) and seeking to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:6, 14:12, 14:26b).

WHO IS THE ULTIMATE HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:9, 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23). Jesus is the Apostle who plants a church (Hebrews 3:1). Jesus is the Senior Pastor who builds the church (Matthew 16:18). Jesus is the Senior Pastor who rules the church (I Peter 5:4). And, it is ultimately Jesus who closes churches down when they have become faithless and/or fruitless (Revelation 2:5). Therefore, it is absolutely vital that a church loves Jesus, obeys Jesus, imitates Jesus, and follows Jesus at all times and in all ways according to the teaching of His Word (Colossians 3:16).

WHAT ARE ELDERS, DEACONS, AND MEMBERS?

Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...*

Elders are the male leaders of the church who are also called pastors, bishops, and overseers (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; I Peter 5:2). The elders are men chosen for their ministry according to clear biblical requirements (I Timothy 2:11-3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The elders are always spoken of in plurality because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church as a safeguard for both the church and the man.

The elders' duties include ruling (I Timothy 5:17) managing (I Timothy 3:4-5), tending (I Peter 5:2-5), giving account (Hebrews 13:17), living exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7), using authority (Acts 20:28), teaching (Ephesians 4:11, I Timothy 3:2), preaching (I Timothy 5:17), doctrinal instruction (Titus 1:9), and discipline (Matthew 18:15-17).

Deacons are the servants of the church who are also qualified for their ministry of overseeing and caring for God's people by qualifications that are nearly identical to the elders minus the teaching and preaching abilities (I Timothy 3:8-13). Unlike elders, deacons can be either male or female (I Timothy 3:8-13 especially 3:11), as with the example of the woman Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2). The deacon ministry may have officially begun in the early church in Acts 6:1-6.

Members are the Christians who are actively participating in the life of the local church so that it is built up for God's purposes (I Corinthians 12:1-31 especially 12:24). The early church had a notion of membership that included numerical record (Acts 2:37-47), records of widows (I Tim. 5:3-16); elections (Acts 6:1-6), discipline (Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1), accountability (Heb. 13:17), and an awareness of who was a church member (Rom. 16:1-16)

WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS?

Baptism occurred through the immersion of a person completely under water and then raising him up (Mark 1:5, 1:10; John 3:23) to show that he was united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-7; Colossians 2:11-12). Baptism is to be done in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is to be done for Christians who demonstrate saving faith (Acts 2:41, 8:12, 10:47-48; Galatians 3:27). Baptism does not save anyone, but instead shows that God has saved him or her solely by His free grace (Galatians 1:10, 5:4; Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is commanded for God's people (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38).

Communion was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper as a means by which God's people could continually remember and celebrate His body (shown in the bread) and His blood (shown in the wine) shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-29). The final communion for God's people will be at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb with Jesus at the end of history in His Kingdom (Revelation 19:9). The church is to celebrate communion with a sober confession of sin and recognition of why Jesus died and rose (I Corinthians 11:17-34) and partake together to show that they are unified by Jesus (I Corinthians 10:17).

Therefore, communion is only intended for Christians (I Corinthians 11:29-30). It was the custom of the church, until a schism at the time of the reformation for the church, to partake of communion each week. The elders

of Element have chosen to partake of communion every week as a reminder to confess our sins to Christ, be cleansed and transformed by Him, and celebrate the goodness of the gospel in our lives and church.

WHAT IS MISSIOLOGY?

I Corinthians 9:22b-23 - I [Paul] have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this all for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

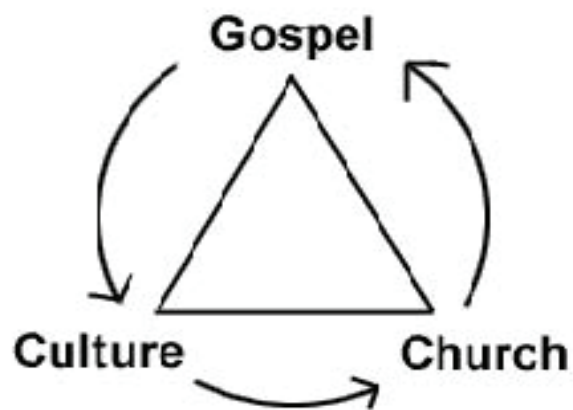
Christianity is comprised of three basic groupings:

- The gospel of Jesus Christ which is the heart of the Scriptures and the revelation of God, and which must be kept in the forefront of every Christian's life.
- The cultures in which people live their lives. These lives both shape and are shaped by those cultures and the gospel must be fitted (not altered) to particular people, times and circumstances so that evangelism can effectively occur.
- The church, or gathering of God's people -- which does include people who are not Christians (Matthew 13:24-30) – where people are built up in their faith and knitted together in loving community so that they can faithfully engage people in the culture with the gospel.

If this process fails to continually occur, the focus moves from the gospel to either cultural agendas or church agendas that are often different than God's agenda, which is the gospel.

Missiology is simply an unwavering commitment among God's people to the gospel in the culture as the church.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN'S TRIANGULAR MOVEMENT OF THE GOSPEL



Adaptation courtesy of The Gospel and Our Culture Network (www.gocn.org)

WHAT IS CULTURE?

“It (culture) takes in media, advertising, information technology, fashion, ritual, worship, academic disciplines, public symbols, lifestyles and everyday practices such as automobile commuting or childbearing... Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art museums. It does not inhabit a set-aside domain.... From the pirouettes of classical ballet to the most brute of brute facts, all of human conduct is culturally mediated. Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime.” – Rodney Clapp

“When we speak of culture in its broadest sense, we are speaking about the sum total ways of living that shape (and also are shaped by) the continuing life of a group of human beings from generation to generation. We are speaking about the language that enables them to grasp, conceptualize, and communicate the reality of their world; about law, custom, and forms of social organization, including marriage, family, and agriculture. These

things shape the life of each member of the society. They are also shaped, modified, and developed from generation to generation by the members of the society. From the point of view of the individual member they are given as part of the tradition into which he or she is born and socialized. But they are not changeless absolutes.”
– Lesslie Newbigin

When we speak of culture, we are speaking of an enormous framework within which people live the entirety of their lives. Ours is also a multicultural and pluralistic society in which there are a seemingly endless number of cultures, subcultures, and tribes. For example, in the Scriptures at the time of Jesus we see the varying cultures of Jews, Romans, and Greeks. But even among the Jews, there are varying cultures of Jews such as the Pharisees and Sadducees; the differences between these groups is vast and a frequent source of conflict.

For the purpose of simplicity, we will speak briefly of three categories through which we can view culture.

- The cognitive aspect of culture includes the broad and varied ways of thinking and subsequent beliefs that people hold. This includes such things as their view of truth, science, history, experience, etc.
- The evaluative aspect of culture refers to the values that govern what people deem important as demonstrated by what they do and what they make sacrifices for. The clues to uncovering the values are discovered by assessing how they invest their time, energy, money, and passion. What do people talk about? What do they rally around? What shared values build their social network?

When unearthing values it is important to note that values are not ideals. Ideals are things people wish they valued and care for in theory but not in practice (i.e. a “Christian” who doesn’t pray, read the Bible, or attend church).

- The affectual aspect of culture is the range of experiences that have shaped people either because they have chosen them or have had the experiences forced upon them. These experiences range from exhilarating and public to devastating and private. These experiences both shape and reflect a person and his or her culture and are greatly varied and include everything from sexual practices, entertainment pleasures, recreational activities, tragedies, etc.

All of these factors (cognitive, evaluative, affectual) combine to compose a local culture and each component can be weighted more heavily by people under varying circumstances for a milieu of reasons that makes culture very fluid and unsettled.

WHAT ARE SYNCRETISM AND SECTARIANISM?

Syncretism

Romans 12:2 – *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world...*

Syncretism is the elevation of culture above the gospel of Jesus Christ and the pollution of the clear teachings of the Scriptures with the muddied agendas and beliefs of the world. This sin is commonly known as “liberal Christianity” and includes everything from the golden calf the Hebrews worshipped in the Old Testament to the sexual immorality and drunkenness the Corinthian church was supporting, and to the common “Christian” teaching in our own day that says that the Bible is a myth, Jesus was merely a good man, everyone will ultimately go to heaven, politics is the purpose of the church, homosexuality is acceptable, sin is an outdated idea, etc. etc. etc.

A syncretized “Christianity” always elevates people, reduces God, and neglects the offensive parts of the Bible in an effort to be more culturally acceptable. The continual failure of syncretistic thinking is to believe that the gospel can actually transform people and cultures so that they do not merely need to be affirmed but instead redeemed. In Jesus’ day, this type of thinking among the Jews was championed by the Sadducees.

Sectarianism

John 17:15 – *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world...*

Sectarianism is the elevation of the church above the gospel of Jesus Christ and the pollution of the clear teachings of Scripture to love our neighbors and preach the gospel to every person (Mark 16:15). This is because it is wrongly believed that if a Christian befriends a non-Christian he or she will somehow catch their sins as if

sin were the flu. Such a person prefers to spend all of his or her time hidden in the Christian subculture, naively believing that all the sin and wicked people in the world are exclusively outside of their church.

To justify their extreme sectarianism they will misquote I Thessalonians 5:22 as the KJV does and command that we avoid every appearance of evil when it says that we should avoid every kind of evil, which is a different matter altogether. This is one of the reasons why the Pharisees crucified Christ. Though Jesus never committed any evil (Hebrews 4:15), he did not avoid the appearance of evil and was condemned as a drunkard and glutton because some of the lost people he befriended for the sake of redemption were (Luke 7:34).

The continual failure of sectarian thinking is the belief that the gospel cannot keep a Christian from sin and bring a sinful person from death to life. In Jesus' day, this type of thinking among the Jews was championed by the Pharisees.

WHAT IS CONTEXTUALIZATION?

Though the gospel of Jesus Christ never changes (I Corinthians 15:3-8), it must be contextualized (or fitted) to the culture it is brought to. This includes making sure the gospel is spoken in a language people can understand with concepts that were faithful to the Bible and simultaneously understandable by the hearers. This kind of ministry takes great wisdom and careful scrutiny by God's people to ensure neither syncretism nor sectarianism occurs.

Every church has a contextualized gospel and therefore must continually undergo reform to continue the missiological work of the gospel in their time and place. When churches fail to reform, they inevitably begin to die and become increasingly disconnected and irrelevant to the people and cultures around them. The problem is that God's people often wrongly assume that everyone in the world is basically like them. This is why every time the gospel crosses from one culture into another (usually solely by God's doing as was the case with Cornelius in Acts 10) there ensues a rigorous debate to sort out what is gospel, what is sin, and what is simply baggage added to the gospel as it was contextualized in a culture.

In Paul's day, this included such things as the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, day of worship, circumcision, dietary restrictions, sexual immorality etc. (Acts 10, 15; Romans 14-15; I Corinthians 10:14-33). In fact, much of the content of the New Testament epistles is the apostles sorting out the issues that arose as the gospel reached new people and cultures. In our own day this includes such things as day and time of worship, body modification (i.e. piercings, tattoos, breast implants, plastic surgery), musical style in worship, styles of dress, sexual preference, authority, language etc. that require apostles who can faithfully and wisely sort out the issues as they arise in each cultural context to determine what is sin and what is cultural freedom that God permits.

Fortunately, the four gospels in our Bible show us exactly how this kind of gospel contextualization should occur. While each gospel is absolutely unified in their central teachings, each gospel also emphasizes some various truths to best speak to varying cultures of people.

| Gospel | Author | Primary Audience | Contextualization of Jesus | Missiological Features |
|----------------|---|-------------------------|--|---|
| Matthew | Jewish tax collector, disciple and eyewitness (Matt. 10:3) | Jews | Messiah/King who fulfills the Law | Genealogy to Abraham and David w/sinful women included, roughly 60% is Jesus words, numerous Old Testament references (over 30 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled), God called Father 46 times, |
| Mark | | Romans | Servant | Briefest gospel, divides into Jesus deeds & death at 10:45, fewer Old Testament quotes, action abounds (over 150 present tense verbs), over 40% is Jesus words, 18 of Jesus' 35 miracles, no genealogy and little attention to first 30 years of Jesus' life |
| Luke | Brilliant Gentile Doctor (Col. 4:14) | Gentiles | Perfect Man to whom all of the Old Testament pointed | Most historical detail and chronological ordering, Jesus' genealogy traced to Adam (humanity), about half of the gospel is Jesus words', 13 women mentioned that are omitted from other gospels, Jewish traits explained (i.e. 4:31, 8:26), emphasis on grace, most detail of Jesus' youth, Jesus' emotions highlighted |
| John | Beloved and youngest, part of Jesus' inner circle, eyewitness, longest living | Greeks | God Incarnate who came that we might believe and have eternal life | Few Old Testament quotes, many Old Testament allusions, over 90% of John is unique, no parables given, I AM statements of Jesus clarify divinity, key words include know and believe, reappropriation of Greek philosophical concepts |

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE AT ELEMENT?

In his book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, George Hunter re-appropriates the ancient Celtic means of evangelizing in contrast to the Roman mode of evangelism that has largely dominated

American Christianity. Roman evangelism has been popularized by faithful men such as Billy Graham, and codified by programs such as Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws. In the local church it can be seen in the large events (i.e. concerts, community fairs, felt needs lectures, tent revivals, etc.) that are intended to draw large crowds to hear a gospel presentation and call to decision by a recognized spiritual authority.

While this mode has proven faithful in the past, and remains fruitful in many cultural contexts, people in our culture live lives filled with entertainment, sales pitches, marketing, self-help seminars and large, emotionally moving events of various sorts and are therefore unimpressed by a large church event and unlikely to give up a precious evening or weekend to attend a church event. So, the Celtic model of getting the church people out to them is more likely to be both faithful and fruitful.

Behave, believe, belong

Belong, believe, behave

| Roman Evangelism (bringing people in) | Celtic Evangelism (sending Christians out) |
|--|--|
| Presentation of Gospel Information | Spiritual friendship between a Christian and non-Christian |
| Call to a decision | Participation in ministry and church |
| If an affirmative decision is made, the person is welcomed into the church | Ongoing presentation of gospel in word and deed |
| Friendship extended | Faith and conversion |
| Training for service in ministry | Church celebration and continuing ministry |

In the Roman model, the gospel is presented as a series of factual statements that when intellectually accepted, allows one to flip a switch within the hearer that gives them faith and passes them from death to life. The obstacle to the "flipping of the switch" is seen as the human will which needs to be prodded toward a decision with such things as emotional appeals, touching music, and frightening threats of hell to move the hearer toward a decision. If a person walks forward, stands up, raises their hand, or indicates by some other means their decision they are deemed a convert and told to assimilate into a church. Whether or not they were truly converted is highly debatable, and their odds of assimilating into a church are highly unlikely unless they already have a trustworthy friendship with someone connected in a church.

In the Celtic model, people are called to come and see before they are called to repent and believe (John 1:35-51). The gospel is presented first as a genuine friendship with someone who is a Christian who does not hide his or her faith or push it rudely. The non-Christian is actively ushered into the web of relationships among the church and welcomed to be involved (though not leading) in the activities of the church that interest them (i.e. helping run the concerts, helping guide a rock climbing expedition, playing on a softball team, managing the web site, joining a Bible study) and the missionary members of the church continue in prayer for the person and seek to demonstrate the love of God in practical ways (i.e. bringing meals to moms who have just had a child, helping a young band record their album, giving a band a place in the church to practice, housing people needing help, giving Bibles and books of interest etc.) not to complete strangers, but instead people who by all accounts do not know God but are in genuine friendship with missionary members of the church who do. In this way the non-Christian is not connecting with the church in terms of events and large programs, but instead smaller face-to-face ongoing contact with people who love and speak truthfully to them.

Over time, the non-Christian's social circle begins to include more and more Christian friends and they participate in the church (i.e. serving but not leading in a ministry, poking around the web site, attending church, having meals in people's homes, attending a Bible study on basic Christianity, going through biblical premarital counseling etc.) as a byproduct of being part of the social network of the church.

The non-Christians see the very natural and practical outworking of the gospel in people's lives and begin to identify themselves with the church before they identify themselves by speaking of "our church" and "my church"—which we do not believe indicates faith but is a good step along the journey to speak of "our Jesus" and "my Jesus". As trust builds with their friends and the church, they have become accustomed to hearing about Jesus Christ often and at some point God gives them faith and they pass from death to life. This precise moment is often unknown to us and what we are less concerned about is the exact moment of salvation and more concerned about their understanding of the gospel and love for Jesus Christ that changes them as they become new creations in Christ.

The non-Christians are not pressured to confess Christ, but are well aware that Christian friends are praying for them and desire for them to be saved. So, when they do become Christians, they confess Christ to their friends who are overjoyed and spread the good news throughout their social network in the church that results in great joy and celebration. The new Christian then usually asks to be baptized so they can make a public profession of faith. We encourage them to invite their friends and family to their baptism so that they can begin their work as a missionary who is to remain in those relationships for the purpose of bringing the gospel as it was brought to them.

MISSIOLOGY OUTSIDE OF SANTA MARIA

There are various church planting networks around the world. Element has long term plans to continue to plant locally on the central coast and to support not only missionaries to other parts of the world but church planting agencies that align with our goals as well.

One organization we like is Acts 29. The Acts 29 Network trains, funds, and sends pastors into varying cultures with the gospel to do the missiological work of the Scriptures by beginning new churches in North America and around the world.

Roughly 80% of church planters in the U.S. fail because they have the tough job of beginning a church from nothing. In our future you will hear of new churches being planted.

FOR FURTHER READING

The Open Secret by Lesslie Newbigin

The Gospel in a Pluralist Society by Lesslie Newbigin

The Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter

The Missional Church by George Hunsberger

Radical Reformation by Mark Driscoll

The Church Between Gospel and Culture by George Hunsberger

Church History in Plain Language by Bruce Shelley

The Master's Plan for the Church by John MacArthur

The Church Between Gospel and Culture by George Hunsberger

Biblical Eldership by Alexander Strauch

Other great articles and books are available at www.GOCN.org.