

**BRIDGING THE CULTURE GAP: HOW JOHN DEWEY'S AESTHETICS  
MAY BENEFIT THE LOCAL CHURCH**

A Dissertation

by

PAUL RUSSELL SHOCKLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2010

Major Subject: Philosophy

Bridging the Culture Gap: How John Dewey's Aesthetics May Benefit the Local Church

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Gregory Fernando Pappas
Committee Members,	Scott W. Austin
	John J. McDermott
	Ben D. Welch
Head of Department,	Daniel Conway

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**ABSTRACT**

How to Bridge the Culture Gap: How John Dewey's Aesthetics

May Benefit the Local Church. (December 2010)

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In my personal experience, I have discovered notable aesthetic problems that face many contemporary evangelical churches. In spite of these churches' best efforts, they fail to bridge the culture gap and foster a meaningful worship service. But John Dewey's aesthetic philosophy understands the shifting nature of our environment and the value of aesthetic experience, providing beneficial insights to assist unhealthy churches.

To better understand the applicability of his philosophy, Chapter II is an exposition of John Dewey's aesthetics that revolves around four central questions: What is Dewey's starting point for aesthetics? What distinguishes aesthetic experiences from others? What is his criticism of the "museum conception of art"? What is the significance for Dewey of our activities having or not having aesthetic quality?

Chapter III is a Deweyan investigation of four real churches: the elite church, which promotes an aesthetic that is reserved for its members; the broken church, which is divorced from community; the humdrum church, which is preoccupied with the routine; and the sensational church, which is characterized by indulgence.

Chapter IV is a description of two recent attempts to bridge the culture gap and offer meaningful worship activities: the seeker-sensitive movement which contends that the church must be “culturally inviting” to the community, and the emerging movement(s), which seeks to dismantle traditional churches using deconstructionism and reconstructing worship services that are experiential, pluralistic, and sensory.

My Deweyan argument in Chapter V is that both the “seeker-sensitive” and the “emerging” movements fail to adequately understand the shifting character of our environment and our relation to it. If problem churches acknowledge that discontinuity with environment is inevitable, seek to meet the needs of others, embrace adjustment as a core component, and value aesthetic experience, they will be in a better position to bridge the culture gap and offer an enriching worship experience in their services.

Three Deweyan lessons are gleaned from this inquiry: value aesthetic experience and its contribution in bridging the culture gap, implement Deweyan insights drawn from our examination of traditional churches, and contribute to society by generating art-products that will benefit the community.

## **DEDICATION**

To Jill: my wife and my best friend. You beautifully demonstrate how to commit oneself to the true good of others.

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Ed and Lagene Story, the late Dr. John F. Walvoord, Kurt Theodore Wise, Fr. Chris Woodall, and Pastor Jógvan and Unn Zachariassen. Few on this earth have a support base like these wonderful people. I do not take it for granted.

To my parents, Michael and Patricia Shockley, and my late brother, Jimmy; you three exemplify what it means to cherish aesthetic experiences in the ordinary affairs of daily living. With his own hands and amateur assistants, my father built a study for me to help in the completion of this degree. I cannot thank him enough.

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Daniel 2:19-23.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

About 11 years ago I was in the process of being hired as a pastor of a small church in a fast-growing and busy community. As I learned about the church, I discovered that it had once been visited by certain men who were in the business of putting a “struggling church” back on its feet. These “church medics” had been asked to examine the church, just as one in the medical profession would examine the ailing body, looking at the different aspects of it to determine where the damage had occurred and bring new insights in hopes that their ideas might serve as an instrument, a defibrillator of a different sort, to revive the heartbeat of the church that was losing its impact and vitality. I found all of this very interesting and began a course of personal study on not just that particular church, but many other churches in my general area, looking at similar issues that the medics had uncovered. My journey led me into a variety of situations, hundreds of conversations and experiences, pastor conferences, and large stacks of contemporary books on how to and how not to “do church,” to reveal that modern churches are struggling indeed. Churches that have a doctrinal statement that would make even the apostles smile, are unsure why their numbers are plummeting, the people are unhappy, and the staff refuse to stay for more than two years. I have always looked for a common denominator, some kind of underlying issue that rears its ugly head in these various places.

One troubling issue I have experienced in many of the churches I have attended or closely observed over the years is the manner in which churches have addressed aesthetics, that is, the study of beauty. My frustration and discontent revolve primarily around the nature of aesthetic experience and how churches relate to the community in which they are embedded. All too often I have experienced a worship service that is either conducted in a manner that is mechanical and routine or indulgent and sensational. In either case the worship experience falls short of what it could be. The worship service is either forgettable or disconnected. But in both cases it is not qualitatively nutritious, that is, it fails to feed me. Thus, I leave the worship service anemic. It did not stir my mind, heart, and will, improve my situation, or enrich my life in a meaningful way. Yet, in other events I find meaningful experiences that do supplement my life such as enjoying an evening listening to jazz with some dear friends, having a thought-provoking conversation with a bright student, working in my vegetable and flower garden, or hosting a dinner party. Why am I enriched by those types of experiences but find myself frustrated by worship services?

When it comes to the church's relationship to the community I find myself perplexed in many ways. Some churches disregard community altogether whereas others seek to serve community, but strictly on the pastors' terms. Then there are churches that attempt to attract community to their location by using entertainment. Other churches that contextualize their ministries to a particular subculture, fail to contend for the truth received from their tradition.

If I am in a particular leadership position in academic and pastoral ministry, where should my inquiry begin if I want to address these two problems? As one whose metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics resonates in the philosophical and theological writings of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, Thomas Reid, and Jonathan

Edwards, I found myself greatly surprised when I discovered valuable answers to these confounding issues from an unlikely source: the aesthetics of John Dewey.

Perhaps no other philosopher of the American philosophical tradition (with the possible exception of Jonathan Edwards) has more fully and broadly addressed the aesthetics of experience than John Dewey. This elusive philosopher explored the nature of aesthetic experience in everyday living incorporating rich terms such as the doing and the undergoing, tension, consummation, inner harmony, and the unaesthetic. He broke the museum windows and purged the rich man's vaults of art-products in order that we all might experience intensified works of art in everyday events, doings, and sufferings.<sup>1</sup> He offered a new way of looking at our encounters, difficulties, successes, disappointments, and delights. His findings are valuable for society at large, but all the more helpful to the aesthetics of the local church.

Therefore, the central question pursued in this inquiry is what beneficial insights can be gleaned for the local church from the philosophy of John Dewey.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, we will examine the aesthetics of four problem churches and two recent movements within the evangelical tradition. We will use John Dewey's aesthetics in order to help us understand why worship services in local churches drift toward the non-aesthetic. I define "non-aesthetic" in this setting as being conducted in a manner that is humdrum, mechanical, and routine or in a manner that is aimless, incoherent, and indulgent. Both extremes are enemies to aesthetic experience, for they are out of balance. We will also use Dewey to

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Press, 1934, 2005), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Unless other wise stated, citations of John Dewey's works are from the thirty-seven volume critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press under the editorship of Jo Ann Boydston. Citations give text abbreviation, series abbreviation, followed by volume number and page number. Series abbreviations for *The Collected Works*:

EW *The Early Works* (1882-98)

MW *The Middle Works* (1899-1924)

LW *The Later Works* (1925-53)

investigate whether and how churches use art-products in relation to certain activities to bridge the disparity between themselves and community.<sup>3</sup> In sum, when we apply Dewey's philosophy to a worship service in a local church, evaluate its aesthetic strengths and weaknesses, and explore how the church can better relate to community, his insights will bring important issues to light and perhaps revitalize its unhealthy condition.

Our study will involve five sequential areas of thought. In order to better understand how Dewey's aesthetics may benefit the local church, we must first examine his major ideas in *Art as Experience*. Thus, Chapter II will be an exposition of Dewey's aesthetics whereby we will consider four questions that summarize his contribution to philosophical aesthetics. The questions are: What is Dewey's starting point for aesthetics? What distinguishes aesthetic experiences or activities from others? What is his criticism of the "museum conception of art"? Lastly, what is the significance for Dewey of our activities having or not having aesthetic quality?

In Chapter III I will offer a philosophical diagnosis of the local church by investigating four types of problem churches. All four churches are real. The first type, the elite church, promotes an aesthetic that is exclusively reserved for certain members of community. The second type, the broken church, has separated or divorced itself from community. The third type, the humdrum church, ignores the aesthetic, for its members are preoccupied with the routine and afraid of change. This church not only glorifies the past, but is also unwilling to embrace change. The fourth type, the sensational church, promotes a non-nutritious aesthetic, one that is characterized by indulgence.

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, when I refer to "church" I'm referring to the local assembly, not the division of Ecclesiology that has in view the church universal. While this information is readily available in numerous sources, Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church: A Biblical and Historical Study*, offers an excellent summary of the usage of *ekklesia* in classical Greek, the Septuagint, and New Testament Greek (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

In Chapter IV our attention will be directed to two recent and pervasive critiques of the traditional church: “seeker-sensitive” critique and the “emerging” critique. Both movements recognize a gap, that is a cultural discontinuity (e.g., art-products, behavior, practices) between traditional churches and community. Thus, these two movements offer a way that the local church may bridge this gap in order to proclaim the gospel message and make a life-giving difference in community. The seeker-sensitive model seeks to correct this culture gap by using a business paradigm or marketing theories to restructure the local church. In essence, the seeker church strives to be “culturally inviting.” Traditional aesthetics of historical and liturgical elements are stripped and replaced with contemporary forms of entertainment. This church targets felt-needs through mass marketing. The latest technology is used to aesthetically enhance the worship experience. The second critique is identified by the term “emerging.” Though emerging churches vary according to their particular context, they argue that the traditional local church and the seeker-sensitive church are aligned with the Enlightenment, namely, a late eighteenth-century scientific, social and political revolution that advanced human rationality, personal autonomy, and the scientific method to create better people and better societies.<sup>4</sup> Through various means emerging churches seek to dismantle the relationship between church thought and practice from modernism. For example, emerging churches seek to reconstruct religious worship in terms that are creative, pluralistic, experiential, and sensory, and advocate an ecclesiology that is more concerned with the church’s mission than with its form or authority.

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<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 1999), 266. Paul R. Shockley, “Postmodernism as a Basis for Society?” in *God of the Bible and Other Gods* by Robert P. Lightner (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 198.

My argument in Chapter V will attempt to show that the “seeker-sensitive” critique and “emerging” critique misunderstand the nature of a changing culture as well as undervalue the process of aesthetic experience. While their proposals are well meaning, their applications are inadequate because these two movements do not adequately handle the environment and our relationship to it.<sup>5</sup> The gap between the local church and culture will inevitably reappear or remain and their solutions may cultivate non-aesthetic activities, habits, and rituals. Moreover, by breaking away from the past in an effort to become relevant, these churches neglect the theological, biblical, and philosophical heritage received from past generations. But if the local church will continually aesthetically adjust itself to culture, recognizing that the community itself changes, then it will be in a better position to interact with its particular setting and promote an aesthetic that is consistently relevant and meaningful to the community. Though a church can adapt to its culture, it may still promote non-aesthetic experiences. Therefore, both adaptability and qualitative aesthetic experience need to be stressed.

Finally, in Chapter VI, I will offer three major lessons from our Deweyan examination of these four problem churches and recent church movements. The first lesson teaches that churches fail to adequately understand the nature of aesthetic experience. Therefore, we must consider, emphasize, and value aesthetic experience, realizing that it is crucial in bridging the gap and generating a meaningful experience in the lives of people. We must focus on process and not merely end-results. The second lesson will be built on the strengths of these churches examined as we discover seven truths, that if applied, will place local churches in a better position to “to take in” the moments and enjoy immediate

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” in *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom*, ed. Richard Bernstein (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 145; xiii.

delight, a heightened vitality. The third lesson instructs churches to contribute to society, as they once did in generations past, by seeking to produce art-products and participate in activities that will benefit both the church and the greater community.

One last comment before we examine John Dewey's aesthetics. A tendency among philosophers and theologians to focus on one idea to the neglect of other related ideas lingers and often impedes growth.<sup>6</sup> Too many of us fail to take seriously the insights of those with whom we may disagree in certain areas. As one who appreciates meaningful ideas and experiences in all realms of life, I seek to investigate, create, and discover ennobling insights. A person who is merely assimilated, processed, stripped, and indoctrinated into that which is static, closed, weak, and unforgiving has precious little to offer struggling churches or society. Like an adventurer in a foreign land or unexplored territories, I inquire into the potentialities that such an exploration might yield, no matter how preposterous it may seem to those who see no merit in the philosophy of John Dewey or Judeo-Christian thought and practice. While we may not be able to eliminate our prejudices, I hope that qualitative growth flows from such a quest.

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Fernando Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy As Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 68.

## CHAPTER II

### AN EXPOSITION OF JOHN DEWEY'S AESTHETICS

Our exposition of John Dewey's aesthetics will entail answering four questions. First, what is Dewey's starting point for doing aesthetics? Second, what distinguishes aesthetic experiences or activities from others? Third, what is his criticism of the "museum conception of art?" And last, what is the significance, for Dewey, of whether our activities have or do not have aesthetic quality? Though the answers to these questions are interrelated, I will answer each question consecutively. Afterwards, a conclusion will follow.

#### A. JOHN DEWEY'S STARTING POINT

What is John Dewey's starting point for doing aesthetics? In essence, Dewey's starting point is experience, but he does not mean "experience" as understood by modern philosophy, i.e. something subjective or the content of consciousness. Instead he means lived experience as we find it in our everyday interactions and situations.<sup>7</sup> Dewey wanted a philosophy of art to begin with aesthetic experience, namely, those events in our lives that stand out because of their aesthetic quality, scenes that grab our attention and arouse our interest along the way. For example, the mockingbird sings perched on the blooming Rose of Sharon, the couple walks their collie down the sidewalk, and the kids play hide-and-seek in the front yard.<sup>8</sup> It is from those ordinary moments that aesthetic qualities emerge. In fact, *any given ordinary activity* could possess aesthetic qualities.<sup>9</sup> Dewey writes:

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<sup>7</sup> For Dewey's view of experience see his 1917 essay, "The Need for Recovery in Philosophy" in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980) or *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, 1981), 58-97.

<sup>8</sup> Dewey states:

In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd—the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous

The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the on-looking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her Goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals.... The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it. He does not remain a cold spectator.<sup>10</sup>

But notice how the statement, “The sources of art in human experience will be learned,” relate to the participants. Sources of art in human experience are found in commonplace activities involving certain qualities such as “*tense grace*” that is “*infecting the on-looking crowd*,” the “*delight*” of the housewife, the “*intent interest*” of the groundskeeper in tending the green grass, and the “*zest of the spectator*.” Any activity in principle can have aesthetic quality and not merely isolated experiences in an art gallery, museum, opera house, or theatre.

Dewey’s approach to aesthetics has several consequences. First, since his starting point is “everyday events, doings, and sufferings,” then what counts as and is relevant to aesthetics is wide-ranging.<sup>11</sup> It is in the usual occurrences of our days that sources of art are learned.<sup>12</sup> We look at and listen to an event, activity, or object in “raw experience” and, with attentive use of the five physical senses, arousal of interest takes place, enjoyment begins to be cultivated, and observations of learning are made.<sup>13</sup> We experience pleasure.<sup>14</sup> Descriptive and active words such as “engagement,” “interest,” “finding satisfaction,” “genuine affection of resources” in *any given* activity in common life are often employed.<sup>15</sup>

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holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts [Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 3].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

This broad view of aesthetic engagement stands in stark contrast to the more narrow approach that would claim that aesthetic experiences only occur in relation to particular art forms such as painting, dance, and music or that they are found only in museums.<sup>16</sup>

Since fewer limits are applied, his view is also emancipating, for we are free from exclusive classifications that generate a narrow our vision or outlook in philosophy of art. The usual rigid classifications in philosophy used to describe the aesthetic experience are questioned once we pay attention to our daily affairs and the values we ascribe to certain activities such as finishing a game, harvesting vegetables from a garden, and drinking coffee with a dear friend. Rigid classifications such as a mere examination of the formal properties of the art-piece (use of colors, lines, etc) or the opinion that an art-piece must be handled as if it is not representative of anything, go against our personal experiences and create arbitrary methods that art is considered valuable. Important aspects of art are excluded and we are no longer free to value the feelings of connection that emerge from an encounter with the art-piece. In contrast, Dewey states that the “tendencies of experience do not have limits which are exactly fixed or that are mathematical lines without breadth and thickness.”<sup>17</sup> Experience is too rich, complex, and multifaceted to permit specific

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<sup>16</sup> For example, in this work, George Dickie contends that authorities or members of the “artworld,” which include art critics, curators, and specific patrons, have to bestow their approval on certain objects or artists in order for something or some one to be considered artistic or/and aesthetically valuable. See George Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (New York: Haven, 1984). In his view of aesthetic judgments, Kant defined the aesthetic attitude one is to possess “disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever” [Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Riverside, 1960). Thus, from Kant, Clive Bell argued that a pure aesthetic experience is one whereby a painting must be dealt with as if it “were not representative of anything” [Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947)]. In other words, there is to be no concern for such things as content because it would violate indifference to such things as conceptualization. This formalist notion that art is not to be expressive of emotion in order to focus on its form stands exclusive and reductionistic [*A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David Cooper (Malden: Blackwell, 1992, 1995), 23-7; 243-9]. In contrast, Dewey asserts: “In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must being with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens” [Ibid., 3]

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 232.

boundaries or limitations.<sup>18</sup> So we create a false dichotomy that the activity we are actually enjoying, perceiving, and appreciating is not artistic.

When we broaden the idea that art can be found in any given activity, doors of curiosity, inquiry, and wonder open as we enter into divergent communities where very different art-products and activities are a significant part of others' lives such as dancing in celebration of Bar Mitzvah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, eating the elaborate soup, Soto Ayam, with Indonesians, or being dazzled by the colors and patterns of Bedouin weddings.<sup>19</sup> As we enter into another culture there is an openness to participate in what others appreciate and value, which may be completely foreign to us.

Another consequence of Dewey's starting point is that philosophy must take context and relations seriously, for to be in experience is to be in a situation. We are not merely in a situation like an action toy sits in a plastic box.<sup>20</sup> Nor do we stand outside of our or situation as if we are able to perceive how things actually are from a God-like point of view. Instead, we are subject to our situation or environment like an unborn baby is subject to the conditions of its mother and the mother to the conditions of her baby.<sup>21</sup> We discover that our impulses, choices, and reactions affect the conditions of our situation while at the same time the situation is affecting us. In fact, we are who we are because of our

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 5. In his article, "Aesthetic Universals," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds. Berys Guat and Dominic McIver Lopes (New York: Routledge, 2001, 2003), Denis Dutton points out that even though aesthetic appreciation and value vary based upon culture-group, this does not necessarily mean that we are to default to aesthetic relativism because appreciation and value are all "rooted in our common humanity" [213]. In fact, Dutton goes on to say:

A balanced view of art will take into account the vast and diverse array of cultural elements that make up the life of artistic creation and appreciation. At the same time such a view will acknowledge the universal features the arts and everywhere share, and will recognize that the arts travel across cultural boundaries as well as they do because they are rooted in our common humanity [Ibid., 213].

<sup>20</sup> John J. McDermott, quoted in Richard E. Hart's, "Landscape and Personscape in Urban Aesthetics," in *Experience as Philosophy: On the Work of John J. McDermott*, eds. James Campbell and Richard E. Hart (New York: Fordham Press, 2006), 144.

<sup>21</sup> R. W. Sleeper, *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986, 2001), 188; Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 45.

interactions with our environment, and we are subject to the nutritious qualities found within.<sup>22</sup> But this awareness goes beyond recognizing this inter-penetrating relationship. We must actively engage our situation as an adventurer; we must take a risk and see what consequences come our way.<sup>23</sup>

The context-bounded aspect of everyday life means that we must also pay attention to the interaction and relations that are found in the context of a concrete situation. For example, if we seek to understand the nature of a flower, we will not only study the root, stems, leaves, and petals, but we will also consider how the soil, water, sunlight, and air interact with the flower.<sup>24</sup> This is an interesting approach because we have inherited the habit to analyze a situation or object by dissecting it into its various parts.<sup>25</sup> As a result of such analysis we tend to give more careful attention to the individual parts than to the whole. But if we fail to understand how these parts relate together or interact, we not only neglect other relevant truths, but we also fail to understand the nature of that situation or object.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, when we consider an object apart from its context or analyze its

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<sup>22</sup> John J. McDermott illustrates this interpenetrating relationship quite well by using uterine metaphors. We are not merely “in the world” like a movie is in a cover where no bilateral transactions and developments are taking place. No, we should “consider ourselves as being in a uterine situation, which binds us to nutrition in a distinctly organic way.” We are “floating, gestating, organisms, transacting with our environment, eating all the while” [McDermott quoted in Richard E. Hart’s, “Landscape and Personscape in Urban Aesthetics,” 151].

<sup>23</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Dewey states:

It is quite possible to enjoy flowers in their colored form and delicate fragrances without knowing anything about plants theoretically. But if one sets to understand the flowering of plants, he is committed to finding out something about the interactions of soil, water, and sunlight that condition the growth of plants [Ibid., 2].

<sup>25</sup> Edward C. Moore’s comment is helpful:

It is a natural tendency in thought to analyze a complex situation, to break it up into its parts. Parts being simpler to understand than wholes, we tend to study the parts more carefully and, by this emphasis, to give them an honorific position and eventually to hypostatize them. We ignore their relations to the whole and treat as a feature of reality what is only a feature of our limited understanding. Throughout more than two thousand years of the history of thought, we have crystallized these partial aspects of experience until they have come to form such a dominant background of our thinking that we cannot conceive the universe in any other way-except as a result of a rigorous training in one of the arts or science, and even then we tend to lapse into the older view when we get out of the field in which we may be a specialist [*American Pragmatism: Pierce, James, and Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 186].

<sup>26</sup> Dewey states:

Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account-and theory is a matter of understanding [Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 11].

various parts without taking into account its interacting factors, we commit the philosophical fallacy, that is, neglecting context.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, we disregard *our own context* in which our inquiries are made.<sup>28</sup>

The importance of context helps us understand why the worth and meaning of an art-product mean something to one person but something else to another, or have different meanings to the same person.<sup>29</sup> In other words, when we ascribe meaning to an art-product or an object, we do so within a particular context or situation. For example, I may use a knife to eat, use it as a flathead screw-driver, or use it to defend a friend or stranger.<sup>30</sup> These varied meanings we ascribe is not merely with objects, but can be with any given activity, relationship, or event. Therefore, not only do we have an enriching way of looking at objects and activities, but one that helps us to recognize relationships that we might have otherwise missed. Thus, Dewey exhorts us to understand the particular context and community out of which a certain activity, event, or object is constructed and how it is related to other things in everyday living.

## B. AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Now having considered Dewey's starting point, that is, experience itself, we will now

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<sup>27</sup> LW 6:5.

<sup>28</sup> Dewey writes:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with, which esthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement [Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 2].

<sup>29</sup> Dewey states:

A work of art no matter how old or classic is actually, not just a potentially, a work of art only when it lives some individualized experience. As a piece of parchment, of marble, or canvas, it remains (subject to the ravage of time) self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced.... But what is true of it is equally true of the Parthenon as a building. It is absurd to ask what an artist "really" meant by his product: he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different stages of his own development. If he could be articulate, he would say, 'I meant just that, and that means whatever you or any one can honestly, that is in virtue of your own vital experience, get out of it.' Any other idea makes the boasted 'universality' of the work of art a synonym for monotonous identity. The Parthenon, or whatever, is universal because it can continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience [Ibid., 113].

<sup>30</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: From Classical Greece to the Present* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1966), 338.

direct our attention to the second question of our exposition of John Dewey's aesthetics: "what distinguishes aesthetic experiences or activities from others?" In order to better understand the nature of an aesthetic experience, we will begin by distinguishing modes of experience from that which is aesthetic. We will then consider the relationship between art and experience.<sup>31</sup> Let us now turn to Dewey's description.

There is a common pattern to all experiences, regardless of the degree of uniqueness of each one.<sup>32</sup> For example, every experience is the result of the organism and environment interacting with one another in an open-ended, temporal process.<sup>33</sup> In moment-by-moment living we are either at odds with our environment and face tension or we are able to make terms with our environment and enjoy equilibrium. When we are able to make terms with our environment, then in that moment we not only achieve balance, but form, namely, an

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<sup>31</sup> The contrast I am about to make is in an effort to understand Dewey's view of aesthetic experience. It is for pedagogical purposes only. Dewey warns against the idea of assuming that they are separate experiences or should be categorized into distinct categories. Dewey asserts that the distinction between what aesthetic and artistic cannot be "pressed so far as to become a separation [Ibid., 49]. Interestingly, Dewey notes:

Perfection in execution cannot be measured or defined in terms of execution; it implies those who perceive and enjoy the product that is executed. The cook prepares food for the consumer and the measure of the value of what is prepared is found in consumption. Mere perfection in execution, judged in its own terms in isolation, can probably be attained better by a machine than by human art. By itself, it is at most technique, and there are great artists who are in the first ranks as technicians (witness Cézanne), just as there are great performers on the piano who are not great esthetically, and as Sargent is not a great painter [Ibid]

<sup>32</sup> Dewey claims:

The outline of the common pattern is set by the fact that every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives. A man does something; he lifts, let us say, a stone. In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing. The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it is intended. The process continues until mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close. What is true of this simple instance is true, as to form, of every experience. The creature operating may be a thinker in his study and the environment with which he interacts may consist of ideas instead of stone. But the interaction of the two constitutes the total experience that is had, and the close which completes it is the institution of a felt harmony [Ibid., 45].

<sup>33</sup> Philip Jackson's understanding of Dewey's conception of experience is helpful:

Dewey invites us to think of experience differently. He asks us to abandon the convention of looking upon experience as something that happens exclusively with us, that is, as an essentially psychological concept. In its place he would substitute a conception far more inclusive, one that embraces what is being experienced as well as the experiencer. Here is the way he puts it: 'Instead of signifying being shut up within one's private feelings and sensations,... [experience] signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events' (LW 10, 25). Experience, in other words, is transactional. It is not just what registers on our consciousness as are as much a part of experience as we are ourselves. When we are fully immersed in experience, its components so interpenetrate one another that we lose all sense of separation between self, object, and event [*John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*, 3].

ordering that occurs out of relations that both interlock and sustain one another. There is unity between all the integral factors. Thus, when the experience runs its full course we have completion, satisfaction, or consummation.

But not all experiences lead to completion. Many of our hopes and dreams fall short of completion. Like a car that is stuck in a deep rut or out of gasoline, we are often unable to achieve equilibrium or make terms with our environment. Extraneous interruptions such as unforeseen events such as broken promises or lack of strength often get in the way.<sup>34</sup>

One critical reason why many of our experiences are unaesthetic or considered to be aberrant is that our own choices prevent them. All too often we surrender ourselves to whimsical impulses or do something in a mechanical way, and it is in those moments that our experiences become unaesthetic.<sup>35</sup> We will observe these choices and outcomes more closely when we look at various problem churches. There are two extremes in moment-by-moment experiences.<sup>36</sup> We may liken these unaesthetic choices to polarized poles.<sup>37</sup> On the first pole there is no appropriate “aliveness,” that is, no active engagement, no interest in doing well, and no genuine affection for the task at hand. We do things in a mindless and mechanical mundane way. For example, we wrap the last Christmas gift mechanically. On the second pole there is no order to our choices, only chaos, excess, or randomness.<sup>38</sup> For

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<sup>34</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 45.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Dewey states:

Thus the non-esthetic lies within two limits. At one pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place that ends-in the sense of ceasing-at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another. There exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience. Then, when the esthetic appears, it so sharply contrasts with the picture that has been formed of experience, that it is impossible to combine its special qualities with the features of the picture and the esthetic is given an outside place and status [*Ibid.*, 41-2].

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Dewey gives other examples of these two unaesthetic extremes. When we organize our room in a manner that is routine [*Ibid.*, 81] or when we are overwhelmed by passion [*Ibid.*, 51], we have committed ourselves to an unaesthetic experience.

example, a person who gives a rambling speech that does not follow a logical outline.<sup>39</sup> Now we may even describe these non-aesthetic poles as enemies to an aesthetic experience because balance cannot be established.<sup>40</sup> Like riding a motorcycle down a freeway, a tilt too far to one side will inevitably lead to a crash.

Unfortunately many of our experiences are “cut short of completion” because of a failure to achieve an appropriate balance.<sup>41</sup> This failure is caused by too much or too little effort, or too much or too little receiving.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, in order for an experience to run its full course unto completion or satisfaction whereby unity is achieved, there must also be an active-consequence bilateral interplay between the situation and ourselves. But if these two are not related to each other to form a unity, then it will not be a complete experience.<sup>43</sup> For example, when a pastor proclaims a message, he is giving effort and his congregation is receiving. But if the congregation is not appropriately giving, then the pastor will not be appropriately receiving.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>40</sup> Dewey’s description of these poles are helpful:

They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence, and aimless indulgence on the other, are deviations in opposite directions from the unity of an experience. Some such considerations perhaps induced Aristotle to invoke the ‘mean proportional as the proper designation of what is distinctive of both virtue and the esthetic he was formally correct. ‘Mean’ and ‘proportion’ are, however, not self-explanatory, nor to be taken over in a prior mathematical sense, but are properties belonging to an experience that has a developing movement towards its own consummation [Ibid., 42].

<sup>41</sup> Dewey contends:

There may be interference because of excess on the side of doing or of excess on the side of receptivity, of undergoing. Unbalance on their side blurs the perception of relations and leaves the experience partial and distorted, with scant or false meaning. Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity [scantiness], all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself because something else is entered upon so speedily. What is called experience becomes so dispersed and miscellaneous as hardly to deserve the name. Resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not an invitation to reflection. An individual comes to seek, unconsciously even more than by deliberate choice, situations in which he can do the most things in the shortest time [Ibid., 46].

<sup>42</sup> Regarding “undergoing” Dewey states:

Experiences are also cut short from maturing by excess of receptivity. What is prized is then the mere undergoing of this and that, irrespective of perception of any meaning. The crowding together of as many impressions as possible is thought to be ‘life,’ even though no one of them is more than a flitting and a sipping. The sentimentalist and the day-dreamer may have more fancies and impression pass through their consciousness, than has the man who is animated by lust for action. But his experience is equally distorted, because nothing takes root in mind when there is no balance between doing and receiving [Ibid.].

<sup>43</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 46.

This interplay, which is involved in a typical pattern of experience, may be described as the “doing and undergoing.”<sup>44</sup> To help us understand this interactive relationship, consider Dewey’s illustration. When a person decides to lift a stone, the lifting can be described as the “doing.” In the “undergoing,” “consequence,” or “receiving,” he feels or “suffers something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted.”<sup>45</sup> Thus an interaction takes place between one’s efforts and the consequences one receives from those efforts. This process between the “doing and undergoing” continues until there is an adjustment or mutual adaptation that emerges and comes to a close.<sup>46</sup> We are not to imagine that the “doing and undergoing” is merely one of an alternative pattern, like pistons operating in a car engine. Rather, we must think of them in relationship together, for the action in doing and the consequences in undergoing are joined together.<sup>47</sup> “The interaction of the two constitutes the total experience that is had, and the close which completes it is the institution of a felt harmony.”<sup>48</sup>

To be sure, this moment of completion, or the “close” may either be positive or negative. For instance, when a loved one passes away, when a fierce storm occurs, or when a friendship ruptures, we might have completion, and memorialize it in our mind, but it will not be remembered as a joyous moment.<sup>49</sup> But sharing a fantastic meal together,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 37-9. On this point of suffering Dewey makes an important statement:

There is, ... an element of undergoing, of suffering in its larger sense, in every experience. Otherwise there would be no taking in of what preceded. For ‘taking in’ in any vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously known. It involves reconstruction which may be painful. Whether the necessary undergoing phrase is by itself pleasurable or painful is a matter of particular conditions. It is indifferent to the total esthetic quality, save that there are few intense esthetic experiences that are wholly gleeful. They are certainly not to be characteristic as amusing, and as they bear down upon us they involve a suffering that is none the less consistent with, indeed a part of, the complete perception that is enjoyed [Ibid., 42-3].

seeing a sunset, or visiting with an old friend, can be both a positive and unforgettable experience.

Let us now elaborate on Dewey's view of aesthetic experience. Like an ordinary experience, an aesthetic moment is a temporal process of causes and effects that occur in the active engagement with one's environment. If we *can* adjust to the environment and the environment adjusts to us, then energies, emotions, relationships, and other factors begin dynamically accumulating, rhythmically building, and integrally organizing to the point that tensions in experience generate reinforcing balances that culminate into completion. But unlike an ordinary experience, an aesthetic is characterized with aliveness, growing clarity, endurance, fascination, intensity, balance between two opposing forces, and a memorable appreciation for the experience.<sup>50</sup> In sum, the genetic traits of aesthetic experience involve the components of an ordinary experience except these components are charged, cemented, and rounded out by heightened emotions.

As an example, when I paint with oils I must consciously undergo the effect of every brush stroke.<sup>51</sup> I have to be able to "see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole" that I desire to create.<sup>52</sup> In order to achieve this balance I need intelligence, direct sensitivity, and skill.<sup>53</sup> But even with my capacities, there are times

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<sup>50</sup> But how does an aesthetic experience emerge from ordinary experience? Dewey states:

A generalized illustration may be had if we imagine a stone, which is rolling down, to have an experience. The activity is surely sufficiently 'practical.' The stone starts from somewhere, and moves, as consistently as conditions permit, toward a place and state where it will be at rest-toward an end. Let us add, by imagination, to these external factors, the ideas that it looks forward with desire to the final outcome; that it is interested in the things it meets on the way, conditions that accelerate and retard its movement with respect to their bearing on the end; that it acts and feels toward them according to the hindering or helping function it attributes to them; and that the final coming to rest is related to that went before as the culmination of a continuous movement. Then, the stone would have an experience, and one with esthetic quality [Ibid., 41].

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Dewey claims:

To apprehend such relations is to think, and is one of the most exacting modes of thought. The difference between the pictures of different painters is due quite as much to differences of capacity to carry on this thought as it is to differences of sensitivity to bare color and to differences in dexterity of execution. As respects the basic quality of pictures, differences depends, indeed, more upon the quality of intelligence brought to bear upon perception of

when the circumstances abruptly change, and I make a mistake. As a result, I feel tension and no matter how hard I try, it is impossible to recover from that mistake. Not only is the painting ruined, but also my experience runs short of what it could have been.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, in order for the experience to be complete, balance is required with each stroke I take and each effect I encounter. With each sensitive effort I have an appropriate consequence. The tensions between my doing and undergoing are balanced. My experience with the art-product continues to build until all the factors are integrally translating into an ordered, organized movement, or interlocking unity. At that point, the experience I am having with the art-product reaches fulfillment.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, this experience will always lie between the poles of “aimlessness and mechanical efficiency.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it is in that “mean” where unity of all these constituent parts is achieved.

Furthermore, “An experience has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship.”<sup>57</sup> Thus there will be a “single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in looking back at the memory of painting, I identify the whole experience with a single pervading quality: “Stunning!”<sup>59</sup> That exclamation was not a result of any ordinary activity that ran its course. It was an aesthetic experience, a heightened moment that was enlightening, intense, and memorable. It stands out among my ordinary activities. First, with the use of imagination I had a desire for fulfillment to some end. Second, as the process unfolds, I find myself interested in the problems I meet on the way and there is an active engagement with all that

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relations than upon anything else—thought of course intelligence cannot be separated from direct sensitivity and is connected, though in a more external manner, with skill [Ibid., 47].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

I encounter. And third, my adjustment to the forces of obstacles and successes leads to final satisfaction. While it is impossible to go back in time and experience art-pieces the way the original spectators did, enduring art-products like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, or certain places like the temple area in Jerusalem, can elicit new aesthetic experiences.<sup>60</sup> Why? Enduring art-products give us a sense that we belong to something larger than ourselves.<sup>61</sup> This experience can be so intense that "we are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves."<sup>62</sup> Dewey states that in a particular moment, a work of art can operate "to deepen" and bring forth this unusual "clarity," this sense of an "undefined whole that "accompanies every normal experience."<sup>63</sup> In that moment we are "citizens of this vast world beyond ourselves, and any intense realization of its presence with and in us brings a peculiarly satisfying sense of unity in itself and with ourselves."<sup>64</sup> The aesthetic experience can be so "eye-opening" and "intense" that we are awakened to new connections, new experiences, and new possibilities.<sup>65</sup>

One critical factor that distinguishes Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience apart

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 113. Dewey's evaluation of art works that endure in contrast to those that become dated will become critical later as we discuss problem churches and their inability to bridge the cultural gap.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Since consummation occurs when temporal balance is achieved by two opposing tensions, the rhythmic aspects of equilibration and disequilibrium all play an integral role in shaping who we are and what we do. First, Dewey states that because of our experience with discontinuity (out of step with environment) and continuity (made terms with our environment), we gain an awareness of this constant rhythm in life. Second, those conditions, discontinuity and continuity, then become material out of which form our purposes. Third, emotions serve as a sign of where we are in that temporal process of continuity of discontinuity. Fourth, discontinuity fosters reflection and a desire to experience continuity once again. Fifth, our desires are translated from mere emotions into purposes or goals. Sixth, in view of the goals to experience continuity again, we develop endurance to face resistance and tension. And seventh, we will cultivate tension in order to achieve balance [Ibid., 203].

<sup>65</sup> Dewey states:

The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes. Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony. With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning. Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total [Ibid., 14].

from other modes of experience is that aesthetic experiences can involve *any given activity*; it is not only experienced in the art gallery, the museum, or the opera house. In the common places of life, roots of the aesthetic find expression such as recreational places, in the home, or in the mechanic's shop.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the value of an object of art does not lie in the actual artistic object itself but in *the experiential activity* through which it was produced and perceived. But how do art-products relate to aesthetic experience?<sup>67</sup> "Art is a quality that permeates an experience"; it is not the experience itself.<sup>68</sup>

In summary, an aesthetic experience is a participatory unity between the art-product and the individual whereby there is a "felt harmony" that enriches a person's life.<sup>69</sup> We will explore in future chapters that there is rich potential for aesthetic experience abounds within the church, provided that there are not too many obstacles, which will also be uncovered in certain churches. But aesthetic experience is not to be consigned to only certain activities, events, or objects such as what is found at art museums, concert halls, and theatres. These moments are not exclusively encountered by the privileged few, the educated, the gifted, or the religious. All are able to enjoy aesthetic experiences in the ordinary events and scenes of their lives.

### C. DEWEY'S CRITICISM OF THE MUSEUM CONCEPTION OF ART

Dewey begins *Art as Experience* with a problem he intends to address in an effort to recover the continuity of aesthetics with the normal processes of living, that is, the isolation of fine art from common life.<sup>70</sup> In essence, when we separate an art-product from

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<sup>67</sup>Richard Shusterman, "Pragmatism" in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 103.

<sup>68</sup>Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 339.

<sup>69</sup> For example, in an illustration of a thinker in his study where he is interacting with ideas, Dewey states:

But interaction of the two constitutes the total experience that is had, and the close which completes it is the institution of a felt harmony [Ibid., 45].

<sup>70</sup> Dewey writes:

the life of a community, namely, its indigenous origins and use, by relegating it to a museum, putting it on a pedestal, or allowing it to achieve classical status, we build a wall that divides it from origins and use in experience.<sup>71</sup> As a result of isolation, the art-product becomes the “property rights” of the privileged few (division), aesthetic anemia (emptiness) spreads, and opportunities for art-products to enrich, improve, and transform lives (enrichment and poverty) are removed.<sup>72</sup> Since these art-products are not integrally related into daily living, people will likely seek to fulfill their aesthetic hunger by beholding what is “cheap and vulgar.”<sup>73</sup>

To be sure, Dewey’s problem is not with museums per se.<sup>74</sup> He recognizes the need to preserve art for future generations.<sup>75</sup> No, the problem is the isolation of fine arts from regular life. Dewey contends that art should be placed in the commonplaces of life, where it may be dynamically experienced and shared by all. We will discover that Dewey’s call for recovery is practical.

Let us now explore his critique against the isolation of art from everyday life by examining the problems of origin and use, enrichment and poverty, and division and need. Afterward, we will examine the benefits of integrating art-products with the organized community. As we explore this first problem, we will also uncover why an “art-product” is distinguished from “a work of art” and how “beauty” is described.

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When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human condition under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience [Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1].

<sup>71</sup> Dewey claims:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals [Ibid., 2].

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 7.

1. *The problem of origin and use.* The isolation of art from ordinary living is tragic because “art is a quality of activity.”<sup>76</sup> Origin and use revolves around the *causal conditions* for the emergence of art within normal activity.<sup>77</sup> When we do not recognize that art materializes out of its environment and has a dynamic and on-going relationship to ordinary life, then philosophical fallacies are revealed. For example, the analytic fallacy occurs when conclusions are made about art-products apart from the context from which they are brought into being and used. These conclusions are not merely authoritative, but are quite possibly elevated and given a classification that is final.<sup>78</sup> Dewey also states that reductionism in aesthetic criticism is one of the great fallacies because it is oversimplification.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the fallacy of selective emphasis takes place when we pass over our own cultural context from which our judgments are made.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast, let us consider the conditions for the emergence of the Parthenon in Athens. The Parthenon is a great example since it was originally a place to worship the Greek goddess Athena. Dewey writes:

By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has esthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being. And, if one is to go beyond personal enjoyment into the formation of a theory about that large republic of art of which the building is one member, one has to be willing at some point in his reflections to turn from it to the bustling, arguing, acutely sensitive Athenian citizens, with civic sense identified with a civic religion, of whose experience the temple was an expression, and who built it not as a work of art but as a civic commemoration. The turning to them is as human beings who had needs that were a demand for the building

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>78</sup> When isolated art-products are judged on the basis of its formal properties, emotions it provokes, or the message it generates to or within the receptor. In essence, they commit themselves to analytic reductionism for they are not taking into account the causal, contextual conditions of which the art-products emerge [Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, 26].

<sup>79</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 328.

<sup>80</sup> For example, some like Clive bell abstract an art-piece from a specific context and apply to all contexts (e.g., Clive Bell's thesis of Significant Form). Ibid., 26-7. For example, Clive Bell forgets his own cultural context in which line and form were emphasized to the neglect of other relevant factors that are deemed valuable (e.g., origin and use). The relations and combinations of lines and colors are what Bell describes as “Significant Form.” Bell promotes reductionism by arguing that what is aesthetically valuable is *only* a particular combination of lines and colors that stir our aesthetic emotions [*Art*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4].

and that were carried to fulfillment in it; it is not an examination such as might be carried on by a sociologist in search for material relevant to his purpose. The one who sets out to theorize about the esthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our homes and on our own streets.<sup>81</sup>

We are able to make at least four observations about the Parthenon's origin and use. First, the Parthenon was created out of common need for a place to worship. It was not created as "art for art sake." Nor was it meant to postulate a culturally charged, anti-establishment, counter-cultural message.<sup>82</sup> The civic need was identified with religion and the Temple was an expression of that relationship to the community. So important was this religious need that the Parthenon was built overlooking the whole of Athens.

Second, this building was born *out of* personal and collective identity. Not only did the Parthenon emerge out of a common need to worship Athena, the goddess to whom the Greeks collectively endeared themselves, but it was born out of their collective desire or need to be associated with the worship of the Greek gods as a people-group. But this sociological activity was even more than just a mark of identification with the goddess. The Temple affected the quality of citizens' lives. For example, every person would be able to physically, relationally, and emotionally connect with the Parthenon as he went about day-to-day living. The Temple became a storehouse of memories, a place of motivation, and a way of life.

Third, the Parthenon is a continual embodiment of meaning. Because of the transactional activity people enjoy with the Parthenon, new meaningful experiences and relationships are made. In fact, the Temple was constructed in such a way that it "continually inspire[s] new personal realizations in experience."<sup>83</sup> Architecture *like* the

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<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

Parthenon can express “enduring values of collective human life.”<sup>84</sup> This is substantiated by the fact that after almost twenty-five hundred years since its creation, millions of people continue to visit the site annually.

Treasures like the Parthenon not only shaped the people’s collective identity, but also their development as persons. Why? The Parthenon was an art-product that was able to continuously inspire new realizations and relationships, dynamically enlightening activities, inquiries, purposes, and values for the citizens as they interacted with their environment in all of its stable and precarious ways.<sup>85</sup> The materials were constructed in such a way that it marks an experiential “way of envisaging,” of “feeling” so that it “most readily” and effectively becomes material for the on-going construction of transactional interplays.<sup>86</sup> This explains why Dewey also uses the word “universal” to describe enduring

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<sup>84</sup> Dewey asserts:

It [architecture] ‘represents’ the memories, hopes, fears, purpose, and sacred values of those who build in order to shelter a family, provide an altar for the gods, establish a place in which to make laws, or set up a stronghold against attack. Just why buildings called palaces, castles, homes, city-halls, forums, is a mystery if architecture is not supremely expressive of human interests and values. Apart from cerebral reveries, it is self-evident that every important structure is a treasury of storied memories and a monumental registering of cherished expectancies for the future [Ibid].

It is simply an impossibility that anyone today should experience the Parthenon as the devout Athenian contemporary citizen experienced it, any more than the religious statuary of the twelfth century can mean, esthetically, even to a good Catholic today just what it meant to the worshipers of the old period. The ‘works’ that fail to become new are not those which are universal but those which are ‘dated.’ The enduring art-product may have been, and probably was, called forth by something occasional, something having its own date and place. But what was evoked is a substance so formed that it can enter into the experiences of others and enable them to have more intense and more fully rounded out experiences of their own [Ibid., 113].

<sup>86</sup> Another example may be helpful. Even though the statue of David by Michelangelo may not mean to us what it meant to the artist and its original audience, it is an art-product that is able to “speak” both “generationally” and cross-culturally. This is evident by the millions of people from different cultures who visit Florence every year and memorialize their particular encounter with Michelangelo’s David. Thus, an enduring art-product reaches a status of celebration because it is formed out of material in such a way that it can easily and intensely “enter into the experiences of others” [Ibid., 113-4].

art-products.<sup>87</sup>

Fourth, the Parthenon was created and designed out of stone with “artistic engagement.” The people not only identified with the Temple in worship, but the creators valued its construction. This is reflected in the superb workmanship of this temple.<sup>88</sup> The work does not appear to be done in a mundane or chaotic way. Instead, I suspect the stone carvers were artistically engaged given their attentiveness to form and expression. Not surprisingly, the Parthenon is considered by many to be the most perfect Doric temple ever built.<sup>89</sup> For Dewey, “art is a quality of doing and of what is done.”<sup>90</sup>

Since the Parthenon became an enduring product of art, valued in every generation since its construction, it has become a source of civic pride and future inspiration for other meaningful activities. To this day the connection between Athens and the Parthenon is so

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 113. Dewey states, “But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced.... The Parthenon, or whatever, is universal because it can continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience....” [Ibid., 113]. Interestingly, in his article, “Aesthetic Universals,” Denis Dutton attempts to identify universal features of aesthetics in reaction to recent trends in favor of aesthetic relativism. In essence, Dutton regards art as a natural category of human activity and experience. He comments that Leo Tolstoy believed that the universal essence of art is its communicative capacity to tie people to one another, Friedrich Schiller argued that art derives from a human impulse to play, and Clive Bell discovered the essential nature of art in “Significant Form.” But all such attempts to identify universal features of art share an element in common, namely, they presuppose the existence of a fundamental human nature. This human nature involves interests and desires which are uniformly and cross-culturally present in the constitution of human persons [*The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 203-4].

<sup>88</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 339. William Temple offers an interesting insight about art and its endurance. However, instead of using the word “endure” or “universal” when speaking of such celebrated art-products, he uses “finality.” Nevertheless, he makes an interesting statement that resonates with John Dewey’s statement that “esthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization, a means of promoting its development, and is also the ultimate judgment upon the quality of a civilization [Ibid]. For Temple, art receives a status that even science cannot achieve:

It takes a considerable time for a secure aesthetic judgment to be formed, and with regard to contemporary art there is much debate. But when common judgment is reached after long periods of discussion, it is secure as scientific theories never are. Many may be uncertain in this second quarter of the twentieth century about the aesthetic rank of Epstein as a sculptor or T.S. Eliot as a poet. But there is no serious dispute about Pheidias or Aeschylus, about Giotto, or Piero, or Botticelli, about Velasquez or Rembrandt about Dante or Shakespeare. No doubt I ‘date’ myself by the precise list which I select; Beethoven to Bach; but every name thus mentioned is securely established in the list of Masters; and the actual works of the earliest touch us now as they touched the hearts of those he knew them first.... It takes longer for the aesthetic judgment to become stable than for the scientific, but when it reaches stability it also achieves finality as other does not [*Nature, Man, and God* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 158-9].

One might suggest that in a decadent culture enduring art-products would be readily disregarded. While a culture may degenerate into “rotteness,” I suspect the art-products are venerated because they become a “work of art” in our experience. In other words, they speak to us in experience. But the key is to have them incorporated into in everyday living, not isolated, because if they are isolated, then they will be *ignored* by the masses and only experienced by a privileged few.

<sup>89</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Great Architecture of the World* (New York: Random House, 1975, 2001), 63.

<sup>90</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 222.

tightly woven that it is difficult to think about Athens without reflecting upon the Parthenon. Athens is identified with the Parthenon both artistically and historically.<sup>91</sup>

But why distinguish an “art-product” from a “work of art?” According to Dewey, an “art-product,” such as the Parthenon is not a “work of art.” Rather, a “work of art” occurs when a person, such as the Athenian stone carver or the citizen cooperates with the product so that the “outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, a “work of art” is *in* the conduct of activities like carving stone or looking out at the Parthenon from one’s porch.<sup>93</sup> In fact, we can extend “a work of art” to include any given activity such as gardening, working a plow, or smoking a pipe. Or stated differently, works of art refer to aesthetic experiences within any given activity. An art-product is a physical object with the *potential* of becoming a “work of art” in experience. A work of art takes place when the person relates to the art-product (transactional activity) in experience. That relationship is “pregnant” with new and open possibilities, developments, processes, and relationships. Potentialities unfold and we change as we encounter, engage, and absorb these new relationships within a spatial-temporal context.

The idea of an art-product having the potential of becoming a “work of art” begs the question, “What is beauty?” Beauty is described by Dewey as experiencing a “marked presence of relations of fitness and reciprocal adaptation among the members of the whole whether it be an object, situation, or deed.”<sup>94</sup> It is a heightened emotionally charged

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey claims:

A work of art no matter how old and classic is actually, not just potentially, a work of art only when it lives in some individualized experience. As a piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains (subject to the ravages of the time), self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced....The Parthenon, or whatever, is universal because it can continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience [Ibid., 113].

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 135.

experience of ordered relations.<sup>95</sup> Moments like these can come about suddenly as when we turn a bend and are immediately introduced to a valley down below that is arrayed in fall colors or when one is floating down a stream and all of a sudden a large cloud gives way to the sun and rays of light strike the water teeming with life, revealing a kaleidoscope of colors and reflections that are overwhelming.<sup>96</sup>

2. *The problem of enrichment and poverty.* Marshall McLuhan once observed. “We become what we behold. We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us.”<sup>97</sup> What McLuhan echoes in media is what Dewey proclaims about the transactional relationship with our environment.<sup>98</sup> Isolating art from the life of an organized community is a serious issue because our environment impacts or influences our personhood, purposes, and pursuits. Art-products such as the Parthenon stand as an enduring or universal piece of architecture and a continual a source of embodied meanings to the life of the community. But if enduring art-products are isolated from everyday living, then *enriching* opportunities for fulfillment, personal realizations, and delightful perceptions are diminished both

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<sup>95</sup> Dewey states:

Beauty, conventionally assumed to be the especial theme of esthetics.... Is properly an emotional term, though one denoting a characteristic emotion. In the presence of a landscape, a poem or picture that lays hold of us with immediate poignancy, we are moved to murmur or to exclaim, ‘How beautiful.’ The ejaculation is a just tribute to the capacity of the object to arouse admiration that approaches worship.... beauty is the response to that which to reflection is the consummated movement of matter integrated through its inner relations into a single qualitative whole [Ibid., 134-5].

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 17-8. This does not mean that consummatory experiences occur apart from tension. Some experiences involving activities, events, or art-products may be so surprising, dramatic, and unforeseen that the immediacy of the moment is consummatory. It may also mean that in that particular moment all of one’s senses were equally “alive,” meaning, that one is fully present, that is, all there, with the past being absorbed into the present and where sudden and complete interpenetration is occurring affecting every aspect of one’s being.

<sup>97</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964, 1994), 19.

<sup>98</sup> Dewey states:

As the developing growth of an individual from embryo to maturity is the result of interaction of organism with surroundings, so culture is the product not of efforts of men put forth in a void or just upon themselves, but of prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment. The depth of the responses stirred by works of art show *their* continuity with the operations of this enduring experience. The works and responses they evoke are continuous with the very process of living as these are carried to unexpected happy fulfillment [*Art as Experience*, 28].

personally and as a society.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, we will discover that the problem of isolation affects the moral, creative, and human qualities and conditions of civilization itself.<sup>100</sup> This will involve examining aesthetic experience and the functionality of art.

Isolation deprives people of potential aesthetic experiences in two compounding ways.<sup>101</sup> The isolation of art diminishes opportunities to have aesthetic experiences with art-products that influence character formation. And second, the isolation of art impoverishes community. The functionality of art is the practical ability of the art-product to serve and meet our needs as well bring out the best in us (e.g., creativity, intelligence, skills). By isolating art-products from its origin, use, and function, we are impoverishing ourselves personally and sociologically, since art is a means to transform our lives collectively. For example, Dewey observes:

The material of aesthetic experience in being human-human in connection with the nature of which it is a part-is so social. Esthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the live of a civilization, a means of promoting its development and is also the ultimate judgment upon the quality of a civilization. For which it is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of the cultures in which they participate.<sup>102</sup>

Notice the theme of interpenetration between in the last sentence, “For which it is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of the cultures in which they participate.”<sup>103</sup> The words “produced” and “enjoyed” by individuals are intimately connected to the culture in which they live, move, and develop. Whether our immediate conditions are polluted with that which is “cheap and vulgar” or enriched by that which is “noble and enduring,” we are

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 16-17; 19.

<sup>100</sup> Dewey states, “The final measure of the quality of that culture is the arts which flourish. Compared with their influence things directly taught by word and precept are pale and ineffectual [Ibid., 359].”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 13; 24-5; 39-40; 44; 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

affected by our surroundings.<sup>104</sup> Consider these two contrasting examples: The decay of art in the Alexandrian period and the reconnection of art and life with the Church.

According to Dewey, the decay and degeneracy of art in the Alexandrian period are reflected in the civilizations' poor imitations of "archaic models."<sup>105</sup> But these poor reproductions revealed a greater problem. They were a "sign of the general loss of civic consciousness that accompanied the eclipse of city-states and the rise of conglomerate imperialism."<sup>106</sup> As a result, theories of art and the focus on grammar and rhetoric displaced creativity. In fact, Dewey claims that, "theories about art gave evidence of the great social change that had taken place."<sup>107</sup> He goes on to say

Instead of connecting arts with an expression of the life of the community, the beauty of nature and of art was regarded as an echo and reminder of some supernal reality that had its being outside social life, and indeed outside the cosmos itself-the ultimate source of all subsequent theories that treat art as something imported into experience from without.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, Dewey observes that the Church, even more than the Roman Empire, "served as the focus of unity amid the disintegration that followed the fall of Rome."<sup>109</sup> He remarks that the arts were reconnected with common life and became a bond of union. Through its services and sacraments, the Church "revived and adapted in impressive form what was most moving in all prior rites and ceremonies."<sup>110</sup> He states that a "sense of unity was constituted" in the daily lives of the people and that the sacraments, song, pictures,

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<sup>104</sup> John J. McDermott, quoted in Richard Hart's, "Landscape and Personscape in Urban Aesthetics," 151.

<sup>105</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 342.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

rite, and ceremony all possessed an “esthetic strand, more than by any other one thing.”<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, we should promote art-products that enrich our community in everyday life.<sup>112</sup>

We will closely examine the role of current churches within their respective communities and how that relationship contributes to the health of the church today. But advancing such pieces that penetrate and effect the best in us, individually and collectively, becomes more pressing and difficult because of the next interrelated problem associated with the isolation of art from common life: the problem of division and emptiness.

3. *The problems of division and emptiness.* These two problems are grouped together because separating art-products from everyday life engenders both “class division” and “aesthetic hunger” among the life of the community. By “division” I am referring to class distinctions that are promoted when art is detached from common life.<sup>113</sup> Artistic objects lose their significance among us in everyday living because we come to think of art as only being found in places like galleries, museums, and homes of wealthy people.<sup>114</sup> Thus the idea, whether intended or not, is that fine art is a luxury of the wealthy. This seclusion of art from common life leaves a vacuum whereby we are likely to seek satisfaction from art-products that are qualitatively anemic and detrimental to community and ourselves.<sup>115</sup> Stated differently, the isolation of art promotes aesthetic anemia, “emptiness,” or what Dewey calls “aesthetic hunger.”<sup>116</sup> When enduring art-products are isolated from

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. Dewey states:

Sculpture, painting, music, letters were found in the place where worship was performed. These object and acts were much more than works of art to the worshipers who gathered in the temple. They were in all probability much less works of art to them than they are today to believers and unbelievers. But because of the esthetic strand, religious teachings were the more readily conveyed and their effect was the more lasting. By the art in them, they were changed from doctrines into living experiences [Ibid].

<sup>112</sup> Art that is enriching will promote such qualities as a social conscience, interpersonal relationships, artistic excellence, and collective expressions of values.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>114</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> This concern is not original. Plato, for example, was a fierce critic of aesthetics because of the impact it can have upon both people and the city-state. See Plato’s *Republic*: 401 B; 424 B; 605 A.

<sup>116</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 4.

community, we develop a hunger that translates into pursuing art-products and works of art that are of both crude and of poor quality. We find the emptiness to be multi-faceted. Let us take a closer look at these consequences of art isolation.

First, “a superior cultural status” is cultivated when places like museums are built and art-products are collected, invested, owned, and publicly supported by the wealthy.<sup>117</sup> The idea is promoted that art is “not part of a native and spontaneous culture”<sup>118</sup> but belongs only to those who possess “a superior cultural status” or who reflect a “holier-than-thou attitude.”<sup>119</sup> While this posture may not be specifically directed to people, it is directed toward their “interests and occupations.”<sup>120</sup> Hence, isolating art from commonplaces promotes aesthetic segregation among the lower socio-economic classes of society.<sup>121</sup>

Second, since capitalism delivered “newfound riches,” people began to adorn their homes with costly and rare art-products.<sup>122</sup> As a result, in order to “certify” “good standing in the realm of higher culture,” one *must* collect art-products.<sup>123</sup> Further, art-products became “insignia of tastes and certificates of special culture.”<sup>124</sup>

Third, history has recorded that museums become showcases of “trophies of war” when nations pillage or conquer another and take away their art-products.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, art is reduced to “specimens of fine art and nothing else” as contextual origins and indigenous expressions are neglected.<sup>126</sup> Even though the isolation of art has served countries well (e.g., when Japan nationalized her temples), the exhibiting of one’s loot

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

from conquest reveals a relationship between the modern segregation of art, nationalism, and militarism.<sup>127</sup>

Fourth, when art-products are isolated from common life, artists too are affected. Since they are not integrally valued and related to the collective needs of the community, they become marginalized or venerated. As a result, individuality *apart* from community life emerges. They reflect this consequence by creating art-products that champion “self-expression,” “independence,” and “obscurity.”<sup>128</sup>

Fifth, the isolation of art from its origin and use creates a gap between ordinary and aesthetic experience, a confusion of aesthetic values and perception.<sup>129</sup> By relocating art to a museum, philosophies about art find expression and development apart from common life (e.g., “the contemplative character of the esthetic”).<sup>130</sup> Confusion of values erupt when outside sources such as the collecting and exhibiting of art simulate aesthetic values in contrast to those values that intrinsically emerge out of ordinary experiences. Additionally, so much commendation is given to certain theories about art (e.g., formalism) that there is no capacity to see aesthetic qualities in the “events and scenes” that surround people.<sup>131</sup>

And sixth, division is directly linked to aesthetic hunger. When enduring pieces are unavailable to the community at large, this hunger grows and is likely to seek fulfillment in

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>129</sup> Dewey writes:

Put the action of all such forces together, and the conditions that create the gulf which exists generally between producer and consumer in modern society operate to create also a chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience. Finally, we have, as the record of this chasm, accepted as if it were normal, the philosophies of art that locate it in a region inhabited by no other creature, and that emphasize beyond all reason the merely contemplative character of the esthetic. Confusion of values enters in to accentuate the separation. Adventitious matters [added from outside sources rather than intrinsic], like the pleasure of collecting, of exhibiting, of ownership and display, simulate esthetic values. Criticism is affected. There is so much applause for the wonders of appreciation and the glories of the transcendent beauty of art indulged in without much regard to capacity for esthetic perception in the concrete [Ibid., 8-9].

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 3.

that which is poor and profane.<sup>132</sup> Because we are part of and conditioned by our environment, our aesthetic condition worsens. This leads us to the idea of “emptiness.” I suspect that the greater the isolation of enduring art-products from human experience, the larger the need to fill it.<sup>133</sup> Sensibly, we can conclude that we are likely to pursue what is “cheap and vulgar.”<sup>134</sup> Perhaps the question is begged, what is the measurable difference between the true aesthetic experience and the opposite pursuit of harmful, vulgar forms? Though Dewey does not cite clear examples of the vulgar, he simply reinforces the idea of the true aesthetic moments being enriching and beneficial to the community. This necessarily rules out many “art-forms” that are offensive to the sensibilities or emerge from a historic civilization in its decline.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, in order to see the other side of Dewey’s criticism of the museum approach to art, we need to discuss the benefits of making art-products accessible to the community. Art-products have the power to break strongholds and bring people together, as well as the command to affect and infect the collective life of the community.<sup>136</sup> Let us consider the benefits in order.

Art is able to “break through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>133</sup> Dewey observes that our “impulsions” are the “beginnings of complete experience because they proceed from need; from a hunger and demand that belongs to the organism as a whole and that can be supplied only by instituting define relations (active relations, interactions) with the environment” [Ibid., 61].

<sup>134</sup> It is as if we are starving and what is remaining to eat is either poor in nutrition or decomposing. But the isolation of the art-product not only generates an aesthetic appetite and will likely drive us to pursue what is poor and putrid, but will also become our staple, that is, our “daily bread,” since enduring art-products are not an integral part of our daily experience. Then once we are habituated to that way of eating, we may find it difficult to change. In fact, we may not even want to change.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>136</sup> Dewey claims, “The materials of his thought and belief come to him from others with whom he lives. He would be poorer than a beast of the fields were it not for traditions that become a part of his mind, and for institutions that penetrate below his outward action into his purposes and satisfactions” [Ibid., 281].

in ordinary situation” and bring them together.<sup>137</sup> It is out of common-life that art naturally emerges, no matter the context. Art is both a universal and unbounded form of language.<sup>138</sup> This seems obvious given cross-cultural appreciation of art (e.g., Japan’s appreciation of Western classical music).<sup>139</sup> Friendship and affections find completion in artistic engagement. This also seems plain since the sources of art flourish in corporate settings and activities (social gatherings and celebrations). Art can generate communion which may take on a “definite religious” quality. Relationship between art-products and community can promote sacred spaces, meaningful rituals, endeared convictions, and shared activities. Art-products emerge from that union of fellowship and become an extension that reverberates all sorts of incidents and scenes of life (e.g., Gothic cathedral, Vietnam Memorial). The union between people becomes a reward and a hallmark, testifying to the power of art. Lastly, art-products are a reminder, a prompt, an *aide memorie*, of the establishment of that union (e.g., the wedding ring) and its future. Art serves as a reminder of the importance of always being together. Art forged out of past unions prods us to promote and pursue future unions. Art-products tie the past and future together.<sup>140</sup>

Therefore, sources of art are “part of the significant life of an organized

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 254. Dewey claims:

Since art is the most universal form of language, since it is constituted, even apart from literature, by the common qualities of the public world, it is the most universal and freest form of communication. Every intense experience of friendship and affections completes itself artistically. The sense of communion generated by a work of art may take on a definite religious quality. The union of men with one another is the source of the rites that from the time of archaic man to the present have commemorated the crises of birth, death, and marriage. Art is the extension of the power of rites and ceremonies to unite men, through a shared celebration, to all incidents and scenes of life. This office is the reward and seal of art. The art weds man and nature is a familiar fact. Art also renders men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny [Ibid., 282 ].

<sup>138</sup> Dewey also states, “Continuity of meaning and value is the essence of language. For it sustains a continuing culture [Ibid., 249].”

<sup>139</sup> Denis Dutton, “Aesthetic Universals,” 203-13.

<sup>140</sup> Dewey states, “Rite and ceremony as well as legend bound the living and the dead in a common partnership” [Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 341].

community.”<sup>141</sup> “The collective life that was manifested in war, worship, the forum, knew no division between what was characteristic of these places and operations, and the arts that brought color, grace, and dignity, into them.”<sup>142</sup> Each of these communal modes of activity “united the practical, the social and the educative in an integrated whole having esthetic form.”<sup>143</sup> In fact, social values are introduced into experience in impressive ways (e.g., dance, rituals). Important aspects of the life of the community are connected.<sup>144</sup>

Dewey states:

Art was *in* them, for these activities conformed to the needs and conditions of the most intense, most readily grasped and longest remembered experience. But they were more than just art, although the esthetic strand was ubiquitous [ever-present].<sup>145</sup>

And third, the power of art also has the power to affect and infect the collective life of the community. This occurs because of the interpenetrating relationship between and people and their environment.<sup>146</sup> But this sensitivity is two-fold in that Dewey, like Plato before him, recognized the power that art-products can have in a person’s experience.<sup>147</sup> In fact, the isolation of art or the idea of “art for art sake alone” divorced from interests of life would have been non-existent to ancient Greeks because art-products reflect the emotions and ideas of community. Instead, such art-products as music, poetry, and theatre, which

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 5-6. Dewey provides a number of examples of this union. In the following excerpt look closely at the descriptive words and phrases that identify this union promotes: “organically one,” “one with the social purpose,” intimate parts of the rites and ceremony in which the group life was consummated,” “torn loose” and its relationship to “significant character,” “celebrated and enforced traditions,” “instructing their people,” “commemorating glories,” and “strengthening their civic pride” [Ibid., 6]:

Painting and sculpture were organically one with architecture, as that was one with the social purpose that the buildings served. Music and song were intimate parts of the rites and ceremonies in which the meaning of group life was consummated. Drama was a vital reenactment of the legends and history of group life. Not even in Athens can such arts be torn loose from this setting in direct experience and yet retain their significant character. Athletic sports, as well as drama, celebrated, and enforced traditions of race and group, instructing their people, commemorating glories, and strengthening their civic pride [Ibid].

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 5- 6.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 341-3.

<sup>147</sup> Dewey echoes Plato’s concerns of the power of aesthetics in community when he states, “Plato’s demand of censorship of poetry and music is a tribute to the social and even political influence exercised by those arts” [Ibid., 341].

play an integral part of the organized life of the community, can powerfully affect our emotions, conjure ideas in our minds, and prod our wills to action.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, art-products can propel an idea into culture and turn something into a sweeping sensation that influences the very foundations of society.<sup>149</sup>

#### D. EVALUATING CHURCH ACTIVITIES FROM AN AESTHETIC POINT OF VIEW

Now having considered Dewey's starting point, what distinguishes aesthetic experiences or activities from others, and his threefold criticism against the isolation of art-products from common life, we will now consider the fourth and last major question to our exposition of John Dewey aesthetics: "what is the significance for Dewey of our activities and practices having or not having aesthetic quality?"

An aesthetic experience, once more, is a heightened process of continuity that is enlightening, intense, memorable, involving active participation, perception, and appreciation. Unfortunately, too many of our daily activities are non-aesthetic, namely mechanical, mindless, mundane, or chaotic, disordered, or random. Dewey writes:

Thus the non-esthetic lies within two limits. At one pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place that ends-in the sense of ceasing-at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another. There exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience. Then, when the esthetic appears, it so sharply contrasts with the picture that

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<sup>148</sup> Dewey asserts:

Under such conditions [where there were no such divisions], it is surprising that the Athenian Greeks, when they came to reflect upon art, formed the idea that it is an act of reproduction, or imitation. There are many objections to this conception. But the vogue of the theory is testimony to the close connection of the fine arts with daily life; the idea would not have occurred to any one had art been remote from the interests of life. For the doctrine did not signify that art was a literally copying of objects, but that it reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life. Plato felt this connection so strongly that it led him to his idea of the necessity of censorship of poets, dramatists, and musicians. Perhaps he [Plato] exaggerated when he said that a change from the Doric to the Lydian mode in music would be the sure precursor of civic degeneration. But no contemporary would have doubted that music was an integral part of the ethos and the institutions of the community. The idea of 'art for art sake' would not have been even understood [Ibid, 6].

I suspect one of Dewey's criticisms would be reductionism, namely, reducing the aesthetic value of art to objective properties such as harmony, symmetry, and proportion.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 26.

has been formed of experience, that it is impossible to combine its special qualities with the features of the picture and the esthetic is given an outside place and status.<sup>150</sup>

Because non-aesthetic activities are so common, when we encounter an aesthetic activity, we categorize the aesthetic experience outside of our normative activities. It is not a part of the flow of our daily experience, and, as a result, we do not seek it out in daily living. We plan vacations and excursions out of our ordinary routine to find an aesthetic moment.

Non-aesthetic experiences are not merely activities that are mechanical or random. They are enemies to what is aesthetic because they keep us from actively engaging, maintaining interest in our tasks, and finding satisfaction in those activities, practices, and rituals. Dewey contends:

The enemies of the esthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence, and aimless indulgence on the other, are deviations in opposite directions from the unity of an experience. Some such considerations perhaps induced Aristotle to invoke the ‘mean proportional as the proper designation of what is distinctive of both virtue and the esthetic he was formally correct. ‘Mean’ and ‘proportion’ are, however, not self-explanatory, nor to be taken over in a prior mathematical sense, but are properties belonging to an experience that has a developing movement towards its own consummation.<sup>151</sup>

So without the intention of creating aesthetic experience, we become accustomed to the humdrum and look to the sensational, the exaggerated, for relief. We, of course, take our habituations, expectations, and needs into all the places we travel. Clearly, and most unfortunately, one of the most poignant areas where non-aesthetic activities, practices, and rituals are expressed is often found in our local church. Mechanical prayers, disinterested greetings, meaningless traditions, disconnected Scripture readings, and similar, overused patterns of speech in sermons and even among the people as they worship and fellowship,

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 42.

are only a few examples. But Dewey calls us to a different path.

Like any other aspect of culture, Dewey entreats us to take seriously the aesthetic dimensions of the church. Why? The answer, in part, is that Christian worship is a social activity that serves a purposeful function. For instance, when Jesus Christ and the disciples gathered in the upper room to celebrate the Passover (Luke 22:19) or when the apostle Paul discussed “the Lord’s supper” in First Corinthians 11, we discover that religious activity is associated with purpose, namely, the corporate worship of God.<sup>152</sup> But these two social activities were not merely regular practices, they were worshipful rituals combined with artistic commitment: “*Do these things in remembrance of me.*” Thus, should we pursue these religious activities in a manner that is mechanical or disorganized? Dewey’s analysis of what is and what is not aesthetic will not merely expose the mundane and chaotic, but encourage a heightened interest in doing every activity with artistic engagement, whether great or small. In fact, if we apply Dewey’s analysis to the local church, then we have a practical resource, a beneficial tool, to help us examine the way we look at church activities and the manner in which we do them.

1. *Dewey’s tool benefits the way we look at church activities.* If experience itself is a church’s starting point in the area of aesthetics, a reorientation occurs that affects the way we observe, engage, and critique church life. Aesthetic qualities are not isolated in abstract reasoning, disconnected, isolated, or cut off from “human effort, undergoing, and achievement.”<sup>153</sup> In other words, for Dewey, we are not to look for aesthetic qualities in mere objects themselves such as the church’s architecture or in an otherworldly realm.

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<sup>152</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, rev. and expanded (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980, 2000), 21.

<sup>153</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 2.

Rather, aesthetic qualities are expressed in the way we *do* church. The manner in which we care for the property, announce upcoming gatherings, and sing a hymn or praise song can have aesthetic qualities.<sup>154</sup> The ordinary activities and events that surround us become extraordinary.

This vivacious disposition not only enriches and gives importance to those activities, but provokes awareness of and the need to address the non-aesthetic. So, regardless of the ritual or event, do we find the individual activities meaningful or do they fall short of what they could be in our weekly experience? And, if not, how can we intentionally pursue change?

Dewey does not merely ask us to discern what is aesthetic and non-aesthetic. He entreats us to examine our relationship to and with our environment, rather than separating from it. We will become sensitive to the active interplay of the choices we make and the effects we undergo from those choices. Hence, do we pursue our church services in a manner that is routine or mechanical or are we sensational and chaotic in our approach? In either case, qualitative enrichment does not take place. In the former case, the church service will be forgettable as a dream; there will be no memorable experience that generates change. In the latter case, the aesthetics may be memorable, but is devoid of meaningful nutrition. In both cases, there is no character development, whether personally or collectively. But in contrast, when there are aesthetic qualities, there will be sincere appreciation, genuine pleasure, perception, and satisfaction. A doing and undergoing will take place in that moment which will result in a transformative experience.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 3.

Dewey also calls us to develop an appreciation for “resistance” or “tension.” Why? Because it is from tension that continuity and nutritious growth occur.<sup>155</sup> Dewey states, “Equilibrium comes about not mechanically and inertly, but out of, and because of, tension.”<sup>156</sup> In contrast, constant contentment results in a cessation of growth. When we are “out of step” with our environment, we develop a longing to be “back in step” with it. Thus, our desires are combined with our will to improve our situation. We will face the tension and attempt to overcome it in order to achieve continuity once again in this rhythmic composition of life and experience. With each recovery from discontinuity with our environment, we will grow and develop as persons.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, we will not approach tension the same way. So, when a church faces a tough problem, such as changing the form or style of music in order to be germane to the changes of culture, we will attempt to overcome it, realizing that qualitative growth lies on the other side. New horizons are only a risk away.

In addition to these aspects of the change in outlook, the reorientation will also infect our values. We find new worth in the exposition of Scripture and in the singing of songs as well as the way a church luncheon is arranged, the church property is cleaned, and the order of a worship service is ordered. Dewey was able to see beauty in the ordinary activities, events, and scenes of our everyday lives. He invites us to pause and see if aesthetic values are *only* located in ceremonial communion, baptism, and proclamation of Scripture. He reminds us to see that the sources of art are found and learned in church life: the tense grace of the musician, the delight of the audio-visual technician, and the zest of

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 143.

the sweet church lady who never meets a stranger.<sup>158</sup> In sum, everyday activities in church life become “pregnant” with values. There is no little person and no little activity. This outlook leads us to consider the second significance of aesthetic qualities: method.

2. *Dewey’s tool benefits the way we do church activities.* Aesthetic qualities are not only discovered in our everyday events and activities but also impact the way we *go* about living our lives. They are expressed when a given activity becomes a “work of art.” Aesthetic experience combines an activity such as singing and converts it into a medium of expression.<sup>159</sup> “Art denotes a process of doing or making.”<sup>160</sup> Therefore the way we go about doing something can possess aesthetic qualities.

For example, I seek to write a sermon, pray with others, or lead a communion service. I could pursue this activity mechanically with no keen interest or passion, or I could pursue this chaotically, without any order at all. Either choice is available to me. But either choice will be an unaesthetic experience. It could be a forgettable or a disastrous experience. On the other hand, if I intentionally pursue this task with utmost concentration, devote my efforts to doing it well, find satisfaction at each juncture, and care for my materials and reference tools with sincere respect, then I will be artistically engaged.<sup>161</sup> Guided by purpose, I take what is an indeterminate situation and creatively work through each problem I encounter. There is a two-fold relational transaction that is taking place. A doing and undergoing, a punctuated rhythm of intakings and outgoings occur. Adjustment is taking place as I am affected by the conditions of the changing environment and the environment is being affected by my efforts. My emotions are building with each problem

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 290-1.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 4.

and each success (development). Eventually the experience culminates in a sermon that is defined by a single pervading quality with me exclaiming, “Wow, that is powerful!”

Significance or worth takes place when I engage any church activity such as singing, reading Scripture aloud, or praying corporately for people in the church in a way whereby the tensions I face are reinforced into a balance that culminates into a complete experience identified by unity. Thus, in a given activity Dewey invites us to pour ourselves into our activities. Though we may fail, the impulse for success in view of past successes and the feelings of discontinuity motivate us to try. Our lives will be enriched and our community will benefit as well.

3. *Dewey’s tool enlarges our aesthetic aim in church activities.* Rather than merely looking at the church’s architecture to see aesthetic qualities, Dewey invites us to become the canvas. In other words, art is in us, how we inquire, and go about our lives. Becoming the canvas involves three related ideas. First, the essence of art is found in the transactional experience between ourselves and our setting, not merely the art-product itself. Second, aesthetic value is found in the integration of the aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience should be our target, our aspiration, our aim. And third, aesthetic experience should be our legacy.

First, given the reality that we will inevitably die, we should seize each and every moment to live a meaningful life. Even though death haunts our very footsteps and we can be swallowed up by the unexpected, the opportunity lies before us to take advantage of the day. In sum, Dewey exhorts us to not die before we actually die. This dying before death is an unaesthetic life primarily characterized by boredom or disorder, performing activities that are mechanical or random, and embracing what is mundane or what is excessive. Instead of living an unaesthetic life, and recognizing that not every single moment can be

aesthetic, he urges us to take the risk and attempt to translate an indeterminate situation into an experience of consummation. If balance and completion can be achieved, then we will look upon that moment as being enriching, memorable, and satisfying.<sup>162</sup>

Second, aesthetic integration should be our practical target. For Dewey, aesthetic status is measured by the completeness of that integration.<sup>163</sup> Instead of merely focusing on the art-product and valuing its aesthetic properties, Dewey asks us to look at the integration of experience between the environment and ourselves.<sup>164</sup> Our goal for aesthetic experience is in ordinary aspects of church life whereby our activities, practices, and rituals are integrated into aesthetic form.<sup>165</sup> Here activity becomes meaningful, enriched, and purposeful rather than unaesthetic.

And third, aesthetic experience should be our legacy. Dewey states, “Art is the extension of the power of rites and ceremonies to unite men, through a shared celebration, to all incidents and scenes of life.”<sup>166</sup> Therefore, the opportunity is also available for us to enrich our present and future generations by emphasizing educative, social, and practical activities that will promote enduring art-products. Dewey states:

The works in which meanings have received objective expression endure. They become part of the environment, and the interaction with this phase of the environment is the axis of continuity in the life of civilization.<sup>167</sup>

If it were not for those art-products that emerged out of desire, need, celebration, and worship, significant past events, lives, and stories would be lost in oblivion.<sup>168</sup> The art-

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<sup>162</sup> Dewey writes, “It is this degrees of completeness of living in the experience of making and of perceiving that makes the difference between what is fine or esthetic in art and what is not” [Ibid., 27].

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 340-1. Dewey notes:

Apart from rite and ceremony, from pantomime and dance and the drama that developed from them, from dance, song, and accompanying instrumental music, from the utensils and articles of daily living that were formed on

products connect the past to the present and imbue our minds with possibilities. For example, the aesthetic manner in which Scripture was copied down by scribes, the creativity expressed as seen in historical churches with stained glass windows, the use of religious symbols that adorn the church pillars, floors, and walls, the stories that Christians created, such as Paul Bunyon's *Pilgrims Progress*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and the hymns by Fannie Crosby and Charles Wesley, all connect the past with the present.

Therefore, Dewey's tool of sorting out what is and what is not an aesthetic activity, practice, or ritual, offers a beneficial, advantageous way to analyze church activities, the manner in which we do them, and why we do them. In each area Dewey calls us to make a choice. We can choose whether or not to enrich our everyday experience by developing a disposition that is "fully alive," advancing a purposeful aim that is aesthetically driven, encouraging aesthetic values of integration, and leaving a legacy that feeds each generation.

#### E. CONCLUSION

What we discover in our study of John Dewey's aesthetics is that from ordinary events of everyday living, sources of art emerge, aesthetic qualities are expressed, and lives are improved. Museums are not the only places where aesthetic appreciation and values are declared. Art-products can also be found in the ordinary activities of life where our senses are attentive, our affections moved, and our minds inspired. And since we are related to our environment and our environment is related to us, we can enjoy the ongoing opportunities to develop our lives by focusing on those everyday activities in a manner that is

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patterns and stamped with the insignia of community that were akin to those manifested in the other arts, the incidents of the far past would now be sunk in oblivion [Ibid., 340-1].

qualitatively nutritious rather than in a manner that is non-aesthetic, that is, routine or disorganized. But unfortunately, one such place where aesthetic experiences are neglected or taken for granted is found in one the most central and influential aspects of the organized community, namely, the church. We will now direct our attention to the aesthetics of the local church.

## CHAPTER III

### A DEWEYAN ANALYSIS OF FOUR PROBLEM CHURCHES

Using Dewey's aesthetics we will investigate four types of problem churches. While there are thousands of evangelical churches that are healthy, revolve their lives around Scripture, promote aesthetic experiences in their activities, and actively engage the community in meaningful ways, these four churches serve to illustrate common aesthetic problems in many unhealthy churches. First, Dewey's insights reveal an imbalance in the manner in which churches conduct their religious activities. Churches promote reductionism by focusing on one religious activity to the neglect of others. This imbalance also finds expression when churches conduct their worship service in a non-aesthetic manner that is either mechanical or chaotic. And secondly, some of these churches separate themselves from community. What we will discover is that imbalance and separation promote deficiencies in meeting the practical, educative, social, and spiritual needs of the whole person and the community. While no church offers the perfect worship experience, those that are dominated by the non-aesthetic are cultivating aesthetic hunger in the attendees.

The four problem churches are as follows: the first type, the elite church, promotes an aesthetic that is exclusively reserved for its members. As a result, this church widens the culture gap that exists between itself and community. The second type, the broken church, has separated or divorced itself from community in order to maintain its own values. The third type, the humdrum church, ignores the aesthetic, for its members are preoccupied with the routine, afraid of and unwilling to embrace change, and glorify the past to the neglect of the present. The fourth type, the sensational church, promotes a non-nutritious aesthetic, namely one that is characterized by indulgence and entertainment. Dewey's

insights on what is and is not aesthetic, offers a beneficial tool of analysis for both the diagnosis and recovery from non-aesthetic activities. To be sure, each of these four churches examined is a real church.

With each examination, I will offer a description, highlighting particular issues for the respective church that contribute to its non-aesthetic imbalance and relationship to community. Depending on the church, different details will be included; however the role of church leadership and the members will be taken into account in each scenario. I will then offer a Deweyan analysis that will highlight strengths and address aesthetic problems.

#### A. THE ELITE CHURCH

1. *Description.* This elite church is situated in a major cosmopolitan city. It was established prior to World War II and gained a reputation in the community for being politically conservative, affluent, educated, and intellectually driven. The simple architecture and the use of space emphasize a worship service that revolves around Scripture.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, the actual worship service, which occurs several times throughout the week, is described by church leadership as a “bible class.” It is centered upon exegetical teaching, instruction in Bible doctrine, and a simple explanation of salvation, all drawn from a plain, normal, literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Little or no attention is given to the cultivation of interpersonal relationships, corporate fellowship, baptism, and personal testimonies before the congregation.

Though there is a board of deacons that manages the business of the church, the senior pastor is its centralized and vocal authority. He is formally trained in Hebrew and Greek, biblical exposition, and systematic theology. The proclamation of the Scripture from the

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<sup>169</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 166.

pulpit is carefully protected by the pastor in order to ensure accurate teaching. There is no use of lay leaders, no matter the level of their education, to instruct adults in the exposition of Scripture.

Music, which is comprised of specifically chosen traditional hymns (all considered doctrinally sound) on a short rotating basis, is played by an organist or pianist and sung corporately. Typically, two hymns are sung and are led by a volunteer music leader. The music is then followed by a didactic treatment of a particular book of the Bible or a theological topic.

The instruction itself is advanced. The predominant use of classifications, categories, formulations, emphasis upon the Greek and Hebrew etymology, grammar, syntax, and biblical history is the content of each message. An overhead often is used to show the parsing of Hebrew and Greek words and the words' syntactical relationships. Booklets, which are available at no charge, not only reflect summaries of certain doctrines presented by the pastor, but are illustrated with charts, diagrams, and pictures. Interestingly, there is little use of or references to outside authorities or specialists, Christian traditions, or other evangelical movements.

The pastor of the elite church tends to be the focal point because he is *the* expositor of the Bible. He seems to interact with a limited group of people who encircle him. Interestingly, he often remains in his office just prior to the worship service and immediately returns to his office when the service is over. Outside of his immediate circle of friends, there seems to be little interaction with the people who attend the church on or off campus. Yet from beginning to the end of the service, he demands total attention. In fact, the pastor has been known to call people out in his audience for chewing gum, yawning, and falling asleep.

In contrast, trivial attention is given to the art of preaching sermons. For example, more often than not, the introduction is centered upon a thesis statement rather than a real human need or an illustration designed to “hook” the listener. The conclusion is often a restatement of the introduction. The use of real-life illustrations is infrequent. Minor emphasis is given to personal application. The pastor stands from the pulpit and proclaims the content of his message to his congregation. The congregants are quiet and are often seen writing down his notes as they follow along in their Bibles. Many have reported to me that the use of the overhead is helpful.

As far as the role of the audience in this church, there is little expectation. People are asked to come in and locate their seats, listen attentively, and dismiss quickly. Though some teach the children lessons similar to the teaching in the booklets authored by the pastor, others only receive the instruction and give little. Opinions and interactive discussion of the sermon and music are not encouraged. Outside of funding missionaries and disseminating biblical and doctrinal instruction to other ministries throughout the world, no significant attention is directed toward corporately meeting the practical needs of others in the community. No activities are situated around community celebrations, social causes or protests, or other public events.

In sum, the church worship services may be described as the “Service of the Word.”<sup>170</sup> The worship service not only reflects one central aspect of the Protestant Reformation, namely, Scripture alone, but everything else about their “bible classes” points to the acquisition of biblical and theological knowledge. Why? Scripture alone is infallible, fully authoritative, and sufficient for the life of the believer.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 166-7.

2. *Deweyan analysis.* What are we to make of a church whose expression of worship is the careful diffusion of doctrine?<sup>171</sup> If we apply Dewey's analysis of what is aesthetic and what is not against the backdrop that we are affected by our environment and our environment is affected by us, an aesthetic experience can find expression. But two non-aesthetic problems stand out. In essence, an aesthetic experience can occur in the way the teaching lesson is constructed and how it is received by the congregation. But on the other hand, one factor that could keep the experience from being aesthetic revolves around the type of didactic teaching that is taking place. The second problem involves the cultural gap between the church and community. In fact, we will discover that this latter problem takes us back to Dewey's criticism of the isolation of art-products from common life. When art-products are removed from common life, both deprivation of potential aesthetic activities occur (problem of enrichment and poverty) and fulfillment of aesthetic hunger is likely to be sought in what is crude or profane.

a. *Strength.* Enriching aesthetic activity can take place in the dissemination of and response to Scripture in the life of the member. When the Bible lesson is constructed in certain a way that it readily marks an experiential "way of envisaging," it effectively becomes material for the construction of transactional interplays.<sup>172</sup> As a result, people can walk away from that lesson and claim that the church service was "powerful!" If connections were made, then the experience is memorialized. Interestingly, they often credit the aesthetic moment to the content of the lesson and the pastor who gave it, rather than the harmony between the exposition and audience.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Richard Vialdesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art, and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 167.

<sup>172</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 113-4.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

The depth of this teaching can offer aesthetic opportunities for those who are unsatisfied with shallow and informal studies of Scripture they find elsewhere. As a result this church not only offers a popular teaching ministry, but also has produced some very learned, gifted, and successful people. Moreover, families even move to this city from other places in order to receive this in-depth instruction face-to-face. In sum, this singular aesthetic is very attractive and persuasive, causing the church to stand out among many others.

b. *The problem of reductionism.* Because the church's singular focus is on expositional teaching and systematic formulations of doctrine, it neglects other relevant truths and other meaningful areas of the life of the church such as the importance of interpersonal relationships, corporate fellowship, testimonies, and opportunities of corporate service. Moreover, the importance of ministering to the whole person by providing such opportunities is ignored. By focusing on doctrine alone this church divorces the uniqueness and needs of each person in favor of biblical and theological concepts.

c. *Didactic pedagogy problem.* Even though aesthetic experiences do sometimes occur in the teaching, an imbalance can emerge as a result of the nature of teaching style that is practiced at this church. Two types of disproportions are obvious, and both involve the doing and undergoing.

First, when the pastor proclaims (effort) and the congregation passively receives, the pastor does not receive a proportional response. As a result, he is impoverished by the interaction with his audience even though he may receive aesthetic experiences in his preparation. Secondly, the audience does not have the opportunity to actively engage the pastor. Other than note taking, the congregation is in a passive posture. As a result, the people are likely to be aesthetically deprived. Not only is there excessive doing from the

pastor and excessive receiving experienced by the congregation, but there is also deficient receiving from the pastor and deficient doing by the congregation. In contrast, if both the pastor and members are able contemplate the Scripture together, actively engaging each other as they study a given portion of Scripture, then there is an opportunity for proper adjustment and mutual relations reinforcing one another into the sort of communication that has aesthetic quality, a proper balance between doing and undergoing. Additionally, more interaction would accommodate different learning styles, thus arousing interest, and both parties would be actively affecting each other.

Associated closely with this imbalance is the fact that the exposition is the church's singular aesthetic strength. In other words, since this church reduces its aesthetic to one activity, affectionate care must be given to both the handling and delivering of the exposition of Scripture each and every time because everything (aesthetically speaking) is dependent on the quality of the message taught. If artistic engagement is not employed every time a sermon is prepared and proclaimed, then the experience will likely fall short of becoming a complete experience for all involved. There is no room for error; no other aesthetic aspect of the church can help maintain the balance. It is too easy for a pastor to rely on his past experiences, memory, training, and the loyalty of his congregation, and as a result, can construct and conduct his sermon in a manner that is mechanical. This likelihood becomes more pronounced by the fact that the pastor is in a personal state of imbalance due to excessive doing and deficient undergoing.

d. *Culture gap between church and community.* From a Deweyan analysis, the manner in which this service is conducted reveals three critical gap problems. First, the church restricts accessibility to the community. For instance, the presentation, as well as the material itself, is not easily understandable to the theologically ignorant or untrained. The

church attempts to remedy the situation by suggesting that visitors entreat themselves to past-recorded lessons and the study of its free literature. But the adjustment to this “aesthetic of the Word” is the responsibility of the attendee. In order for the visitor to come to a position where tension gives way to continuity, indoctrination must take place. Interestingly, there is no helpful guide to explain some of the more important and repetitive technical words used by the pastor.

Secondly, since the structure of the worship service is inflexible and too focused upon the mind, there is little opportunity to promote an attractive aesthetic setting to outsiders. When a local church only practices transient, dated expressions of worship, whether it is by church leadership or congregants, it fails to recognize that the gap between itself and community will continue to expand. The church becomes static in its art-forms whereas culture continues to change and develop. Interestingly, creativity, which many theologians consider to be an aspect of being made in the image of God, is squelched in the church.<sup>174</sup>

Focusing the congregation’s attention to the content of the mind to the neglect of other religious activities such as corporate opportunity of fellowship has had most profound results. The people tend to have difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships outside of their immediate context. They are skeptical and feel threatened by any other teaching, foster an unusual loyalty to the pastor, are not able to meaningfully engage in theological diversity (e.g., reasonable and competitive interpretations), and are overly critical of other expressions of biblical worship.

If the church refuses to expand its activities where aesthetic experiences can occur outside of the receiving of Scripture, then it not only misses opportunities to be enriched in

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<sup>174</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 50-9.

other meaningful ways, but will fail to contribute to the well-being of the community. If there is no meaningful outreach to meet practical needs, for example, why would the community even look to the church? This gap becomes even more explicit when certain ways of doing are employed for the sake of tradition, personal preference, or habituation. When activities are done poorly, people are less likely to be inspired, aroused, or moved. As a result, the church is unattractive to the community, if not ignored. Like an art-product relegated to the museum, church itself becomes isolated from common life and is only enjoyed by the few.

Thirdly, a lack of opportunity to formulate interpersonal relationships in church-related activities (e.g., pot-luck meals; small groups) will further divide the elite church from community. The human need for relationships is virtually ignored and opportunities for the assimilation of outsiders are diminished. Further, with the sole focus on Bible lessons, the members themselves are not enriched corporately as a church in meeting the practical needs of the community.

Overall, the elite church is one that promotes an aesthetic that is perhaps formally elaborate, but divorced or isolated from community. In view of its activities, this church is somewhat inaccessible to the community. While the elite church offers a singular activity where aesthetic experiences could occur, it fails to recognize the non-aesthetic imbalance that results from its form of didactic teaching. As a result, all miss opportunities to dynamically learn, reflect, and grow together. The result is holistic malnourishment. There is the ever-present concern that a message may be prepared and delivered in a manner that is mechanical. The church promotes individualism while disregarding the significance of collective relationships and interactive goals. Because the church's aesthetic is for a

learned or trained churchgoer, the corporate opportunity to actively connect, engage, and improve the organized life of the community is negligible.

3. *Deweyan insights.* Dewey's response to this church would be to recognize the value of *other* activities or avenues of aesthetic experience. Do not commit reductionism by focusing on one activity to the neglect of others. Fellowship gatherings, small group discussions, testimonies, creative use of music, pastoral interactions, and the enablement of lay leaders are only a few examples of activities where artistic engagement may occur. The church must seek to promote interpersonal relationships where community, personal differences, and continuities are valued among its people. Dewey would also contend that the church must open up more opportunities to serve the community in an egalitarian or open manner, promoting organic transactional activities that will increase awareness of the relationship of the church and its environment, which will hopefully lead to practical benefits for all involved.

## B. THE BROKEN CHURCH

1. *Description.* Proximal to one of the largest cities in America, this evangelical church is surrounded by master-planned communities, schools of stellar reputation, a very active civic organization, and other resources that make this community inviting for growing families. This small church is the remnant of a large traditional church. The leadership decided to relocate the church due to a substantive influx of immigrants. Because of relocation issues, changes in church leadership, and internal turmoil, membership eventually reduced from a few hundred to less than twenty families.

Unlike the elite church, the church's constitution is such that the practical authority of the church does not reside in the senior pastor, or "teaching pastor," but in the "ruling elders." These elders are volunteers elected and annually reaffirmed by the congregation.

Unanimous elder consent is required to move forward in the ministry or change direction even slightly. In major decisions such as hiring or terminating a pastor, the congregation has final authority. Although the pastor must attend all meetings and offer suggestions and guidance, he does not have a vote. He is not subject to annual reaffirmation. This system of “checks and balances” is the backbone of the church and the leadership is, without apology, bound to it. Interestingly, this type of church government is in direct response to a nearby elite church whereby all the authority resides in the senior pastor.

The worship service revolves around contemporary songs and the delivery of a structured sermon. Three vocalists, all volunteer, lead the music using a keyboard, guitars, and drums. The children are taught through an object lesson at the stage. The pastor, who is well educated, offers an expository message that typically lasts 40 minutes and contains a number of illustrations and personal applications. An outline of the sermon is provided and a visual screen is utilized to aid in clarity.

The church offers a number of ministries centered on the teaching of Scripture and fellowship opportunities. In addition to weekly small groups that meet in the homes of the members, Sunday school classes for all ages are offered, as well as a special mid-week class geared toward preparing the young people for intellectual and moral issues they might face after high school graduation. Organized fellowship activities such as games, banquets, and other events are ongoing. Conferences are held featuring guest speakers. Additionally, the church routinely has once a month dinner gatherings in multiple homes and visitors are usually invited.

As far as the role of the audience in this church, high commitment is expected but not demanded. In part, this is due to strong family values embraced by the church membership. Because families are so interwoven into each other’s lives, people are very knowledgeable

about each other's situation. Transparency is valued. Moreover, the willingness to minister and be ministered to is naturally expected. Communication with each other is highly valued. One member said, "In many ways we adults are literally like brothers and sisters."

2. *Deweyan analysis.* In spite of the advantages it offers to its members in comparison to the elite church, this church does not thrive due to the weaknesses and imbalance generated from its failings. This church possesses one of the most valuable strengths any community could possess, which is intimate relationships. The teaching in each setting, as well, is usually delivered in an engaging and nutritious manner. Unfortunately, this church is overwhelmed by a problem that cannot be overcome by the loving relationships or substantive teaching, namely, separation from the community at large. During the research phase for this study, the leadership has chosen to sell the church property and gather in homes. Many families have moved to other churches even though they are still involved in the lives of one another and are called upon or show up when a particular crisis occurs.

a. *Strengths.* Aesthetic experiences repeatedly occur within the church in view of important relationships made among the church families. From the young to the old, families are involved in each other's lives. From those relationships, families are helped and strengthened, resources are shared, and individual as well as corporate growth occurs. Moreover, these relationships generate a shared value of communication which can possess aesthetic qualities. For example, they are able to be genuine with each other, accepting of each other's oddities, interests, and issues. They value the harmony of differences that makes up their congregation.<sup>175</sup> In other words, they prize a balance between their differences and continuities. In that balance rhythm and shared growth find expression.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, 236-9.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

While the exposition of Scripture each Sunday is didactic in nature, opportunities naturally came about to discuss the message and communicate with the pastor. Moreover, cooperative opportunities of learning for all who were involved in the Sunday school programs, youth activities, and small group ministries are maximized. There is never the appearance of mechanical or random teaching; all are given ample learning and growing experiences.

b. *Separation from community.* From a Deweyan perspective, this church is broken and possibly unable to recover from its disconnection from the community. To some extent the church leadership is ignorant of the relationship between the members and the environment. They feel like a real close-knit family rhetorically asking questions like, “Why should we bring people into the church when we are happy with the church as it is?” Moreover, the larger community is, for the most part, ignorant of the church and its opportunities. While relational friendship is one the deepest human needs, there is no strategic method of communicating to the society that this church could offer an answer to that need. Thus, separation from community has been central to its lack of health. But the nature of this separation is multifaceted.

First, the church leadership has not seen its unwillingness to embrace the community as an obstacle to growth. This was evident by the decision to move from the original location because of the diverse people-groups that were migrating to the area. The leaders chose, most diplomatically, to set themselves apart (protecting their governing structure and their membership), and did not embrace the growing diversity that surrounded them, thus setting a precedent. So they moved to another suburban community that they thought would better reflect their way of life. In doing so they believed the church would be in a better position to grow.

Second, the church did not reach out to its new neighborhood in an organized, meaningful way. Random attempts were typically fruitless. Just like the former community, the growing neighborhood became diverse as Asian-Americans and Indian-Americans began to buy new homes. Perhaps in the best interests of this church it would have been better served had a pastor or staff member been acquired who reflected the cultural background of the neighborhood residents in order to bridge this growing disparity. Moreover, the church could have made itself or its facilities more available to meet the diverse needs of the public. These opportunities were always extended to selective organizations that did not offer potential for church growth.

And third, the governmental leadership structure is an obstacle to change. If one of the elders or the pastor formulates an idea to address the growing problem, then he is placed in a difficult position of having to convince every ruling elder since unanimous consent is required. Since the elders are closely involved in the lives of the members, they have always been very sensitive to their opinions and reactions to change. Some significant church participants believed that this church should serve as a “place of seclusion” from the outside world, to be a place where their children could grow without being influenced by outsiders whose family values may be different. These factors have contributed to the immobilization of the church as a whole.

3. *Deweyan insights*. The broken church typifies many churches that are separated from their community. Dewey’s analysis serves as a warning. If separated too long, the church will either break or merely subsist. Has the church become disconnected, forgotten by community?<sup>177</sup> Has the church neglected the value of the greater community, namely,

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<sup>177</sup> McDermott, *The Drama of Possibilities*, 207.

the culture in which the church is located? If so, then the church is broken. But Dewey's analysis can serve as a corrective tool for potential vitality.

If a church is facing this type of problem, then realizing that it is out of step with the march of its environment is an important step. Recovery, if obtained, will lead to organic growth. Had this church found creative and meaningful ways to embrace and relate to its diverse neighborhood, the church's situation would have likely improved.

But churches in this situation must realize that change is a constant, both within and beyond its walls (e.g., membership changes, personal turmoil, and new experiences). Therefore, the church needs to understand its own state and its relationship to the community. Like a Bedouin nomad who guides his animals in the desert wilderness, the leadership must be willing to adjust properly to tension, whether sudden or a buildup over time.

If we examine the elite church and broken church together, we are able to glean the following insights. While both churches can have in particular instances activities with aesthetic quality, they both tend to suffer from isolation or separation from community, which is not conducive to having the most enriching aesthetic experiences. Both churches place restrictions on outsiders, but in a different way. The elite church demands that people adapt themselves to the pastor's didactic style and authority. The broken church separates itself in an effort to be culturally homogeneous and protective of its families. These "unwritten" mores can be unaesthetic because they can restrict natural church development. In fact, whenever a church has too many or too little customs, rules, or orders, it can be difficult for organic aesthetic experience to emerge. While the broken church succeeds in personal relationships, it has chosen not to corporately and actively

participate in community. Sadly, it appears that this separation between church and community might cost the church its corporate existence.

To be sure, the shared weaknesses among the previous case studies is the lack of experiences, they understand the position they hold *within* community. If I return to the example of the Parthenon, potentialities for aesthetic experiences on different levels abounded. The workers themselves who were engaged in their artistry were experiencing ongoing aesthetic moments, but, just as importantly, the finished product enables others in the community the potentiality of an aesthetic experience as well. In contrast to that scenario, the leadership and members of these churches may be affording themselves aesthetic occurrences, but they are not ones that lend themselves to further potential aesthetic connections to the community. We will now consider the humdrum church which relishes in the routine.

### C. THE HUMDRUM CHURCH

1. *Description.* This evangelical church is strategically located in a town of approximately 35,000 people. The church origins date to the early 1980s with several families meeting together in a business office. Just within a few years the church grew to over a hundred people. Similarly to the elite church, the church's ministry revolves around the exposition of Scripture.

The church's authority resides in an elder board. The board functions in cooperation with the solo pastor as spiritual leaders, ministering and caring for the congregation. All elders have voting power and decisions are made by majority vote. The church also has a board of deacons that assists in the business affairs of the church. Like the previous churches studied, the pastor is very well educated. A part-time youth director is also employed. Each elder has oversight over a number of families and are often in contact with

them. The church leaders value efficiency such as time-management, comprehensiveness, and attention to details. Often they discuss finer points of theological doctrine.

The congregational members are largely successful, and most over the age of 40. The men often wear jackets and ties and the women tend to wear fashionable outfits. In fact, the church seldom struggles with financial concerns.

The church's building is an older property. The simple brick architecture reflects the central theme of the worship service, primarily the teaching of Scripture. The traditional church auditorium is simple with stained glass, windows, red carpet, and symbolic tapestries on each side of the wall. An organ and piano are positioned on either side of simple rectangular pulpit. The oak communion table sits just below the pulpit. The landscape is attractive with an assortment of flowers. A large playground is next to the church. The church is visible from one of the main roads in town.

The order of service is strictly adhered to and is as follows: hymn, announcements, two more hymns, Scripture reading, prayer, children sermon, hymn, message, closing hymn, and benediction. The music is traditional with hymns and spiritual praise songs from the seventies and eighties and is led by volunteer amateurs. The pastor presents an expository message lasting anywhere from thirty to forty minutes. This church offers a program called children's church. After the pastor gives the children's message, and without even an announcement, the children file out to their respective classes. They receive a Bible lesson and an opportunity to sing and play.

In terms of other activities, this church features an active youth program organized by a part-time staff worker, a college student, who functions under the direct authority of the pastor. He offers an interactive program of biblical studies and fellowship. The church also offers an adult Sunday school class in the fellowship hall. The teaching process is typically

collaborative in nature and the audience is mature. Many come early to Sunday school in order to fellowship with church friends that they have known for perhaps decades. Lastly, the church is involved in supporting social causes ranging from sending and supporting medical teams to third world countries to contributing financially to special community needs. They are also involved in supporting many missionaries.

The pastor is quiet and unassuming. His message is expositional in nature. Like the elite church, rarely is there an introduction that touches upon a real need. The conclusion is a restatement of the introduction. While the message is often rich in expositional details there are few illustrations and personal applications. The illustrations used are often the same ones he has used before. This pastor is always available and present when in need. He strives to live a simple life. He dislikes surprises of any sort and exercises enough authority to ensure no potential problems or threats arise in the programs.

The responsibility of the audience is to regularly attend, participate in a specific manner when called upon, and maintain unity, never disturbing the peace. Like the elite church, being a voice of objection or dissension generates alienation or marginalization from the church. People who enjoy structure and the church model of yesteryear are naturally drawn to this atmosphere.

2. *Deweyan analysis*. This church is to be commended for its fellowship among its members. This church is also to be extolled for its willingness to think beyond its own needs. Notwithstanding, the church's worship service champions the routine.

a. *Strength*. With its mature audience, the church has many relationships that have withstood the test of time and have grown deep. Hugs are shared liberally and visitors, though infrequent, are made to feel welcome. Careful attention to the needs of members

and deep conversations and encouragement from friends often leads to aesthetic experiences.

b. *The problem of the routine.* In every possible way, the church's worship follows the same mechanical format or order every week. For example, the lighting is never adjusted, the hymns and songs are on a short rotation list and are sung and played the same way, and the manner in which the sermon is designed and delivered does not change. No anticipation of what will come next in the church's worship service is needed. When in doubt, a detailed bulletin lists every step in the order of worship. Hence, if anything occurs out of the ordinary, such as a vacation for the pastor, several advance notices are provided, or, in some cases, an apology is offered. There is also no tension. All is calm, composed, and placid.

The non-aesthetic mechanical nature of the church's worship service involves several factors. First, the leadership of the church is fearful of change. Slight changes that have occurred, only by accident (e.g., organist becomes unexpectedly ill), overwhelm the pastor with personal tension and anxiety. He admits that any form of change is very emotionally and physically difficult.

Similarly, many members of the congregation seem to have embraced the personality of the pastor, preferring the routine. This is reflected in the transactional activity of the church setting. In fact, anything that happens unexpectedly, for example, a first-time visitor raises her hands in worship, is thus memorable, even though the experience will fall short of completion. Thus, in both parties, the church leadership and the congregation, stability means peace, and tension is always perceived negatively. Like Dewey states, "Resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not as an invitation to

reflection.”<sup>178</sup> Even though the pastor occasionally confesses that changes need to be made to make the service more enriching and inviting to younger people, the unrest it would cause within himself and those in his congregation would be too turbulent and overwhelming to seriously consider.

Second, security is found in regularity. Fearful of the unexpected, the order of the service is rigidly followed. For instance, there are rarely any exceptions to the church’s order of service. The clock governs every move. Further, habitual prayers are offered. A new hymn is preceded by an explanation (an apology?) for its appearance. Risks are avoided.

Third, the church clings to and glories in the past. The church relishes its own tradition and contends that the best way to worship God is to follow what it has always known. If another church seeks to be cultural relevant to its community, it will be judged by the humdrum church to be necessarily equated with biblical compromise unto secular trends in culture with the use of contemporary genre and such instruments as electronic guitars and drums. I wonder if the fear to adjust to a more spontaneous and dynamic order of service involves the notion that the people would have to give up the nostalgic sentiments they collectively share. They are not only honoring their heritage, but their weekly experience evokes past memories with loved ones.

Fourth, familiarity is valued over creativity. There are many members in the church who have amazing testimonies, who are amazingly gifted in such as areas as art and music, and have contagious personalities. They are left as untapped resources, that is, unused, unexposed, or unable to be given a platform. Involvement with the unknown is too risk, so

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<sup>178</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 66.

creativity is stifled. As a result, we only see the same people doing the same jobs, singing the same songs, and playing the same instruments in the same way. According to Dewey, the danger is that familiarity induces indifference, apathy, and inactivity.<sup>179</sup> Additionally, the fear of change also generates alienation because if someone visits the church, then, like the elite church, he must conform to one way of doing things. If he does not conform, he is not welcome to stay.

Fifth, there is very little room for a life-changing experience. Because the worship service is done in a very mechanical way, there is very little room for someone's life to be touched deeply, that is, enraptured in an aesthetic moment. Should they be touched by the music or the sermon, it is interpreted as highly emotional, unwarrantedly mystical, and intellectually pointless. Thus, any aesthetic moment that may be found is better kept to oneself. Furthermore, there is no "altar call" or "invitation" extended at the end of the service. No part of this sacred hour can be corrupted by the unpredictable nature of people and there is no need to affirm the teaching or the order of service other than the fact that all went smoothly and finished on time.

Lastly, the church's aesthetics is constructed in such a way that it is non-nutritive to those in its sphere of influence. While the worship service brings the past to the present, there is no anticipation, that is, no vision for something new in the worship service. No element of experimentation to the church's aesthetics or openness to new ideas is encouraged.<sup>180</sup> Instead, new ideas are met with the refusal to change. While its repudiation

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 108. Dewey puts it this way:

How, then, can objects of experience avoid becoming expressive? Yet apathy and torpor [inactivity] conceal this expressiveness by building a shell about objects. Familiarity induces indifference, prejudice blinds us; conceit looks through the wrong end of a telescope and minimizes the significance possessed by objects in favor of the alleged importance of the self [Ibid].

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 51.

to adapt to a more spontaneous and dynamic setting may be vacuous to some members, the leadership is willing to accept that over the possibility of losing other members who are enraged by a slight modification. The church is, for the most part, immobilized by the unknown and prejudiced by the familiar.<sup>181</sup>

Why is the routine non-aesthetic? There is no curiosity, no suspense, and no movement towards consummation through a connected series of qualities. The music, the prayers, the exposition, the children's lessons, and the interior decorations do not qualitatively change and contribute to one another. There is no tension. There is only a mechanical connection.<sup>182</sup> As a result, there is no active interplay of rhythm, imagination, and unity. There are no forces that are carrying these qualities to a decisive moment in one's life to produce an organic moment of consummation. Consequently, the church worship service falls short of a complete experience. The habituated non-aesthetic routine becomes normative in the life of the church. Qualitative impoverishment is the result and every service is forgettable. Though its members may become aware of the cultural gap, all that can be offered to the community is rather mundane.

3. *Deweyan insights*. How would Dewey speak to this problem? He would charge the church to rethink its position on change. Look at risk and tension from a different perspective. Though change for change sake is not profitable, change to meet a growing need is natural and necessary for growth. If heels are stubbornly dug into the ground for too long, the church will find that it no longer has a place within the ever-changing community. The humdrum church could suffer the same fate as broken church. Lastly, incorporating objects of art can be used to assist in changing the worship service from

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 41.

inactivity to active engagement. Dewey writes:

Art throws off the covers that hid the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slack of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in a new experience of life.

Because the objects of art are expressive, they communicate. I do not say that communication to others is the intent of an artist. But it is the consequence of his work-which indeed lives only in communication when it operates in the experience of others.<sup>183</sup>

#### D. THE SENSATIONAL CHURCH

The other extreme and enemy to aesthetic experience is the sensational. Often in reaction to the non-aesthetic routines that typify many worship services, many pursue churches that emphasize the sensational, and by this I mean promoting a worship experience that not only attracts a great deal of interest, but also overwhelms the senses. But like the humdrum church, this church champions a non-aesthetic experience that is not beneficial.

1. *Description.* This is a non-denominational church averaging several hundred people per week. The location is located in a strategic place in a major cosmopolitan city in order that it may impact the community. The leadership boasts inclusivity and diversity.

The children are organized neatly into colorful classrooms and taught with the best of materials. Children's education is taken very seriously and no expense is spared to offer the very best. The leaders want the program to be a thrilling and entertaining experience to keep them wanting to come back. One person stated that if the church loses the interest of the parents, they will likely continue to attend for the sake of their children. The youth set-up is similar to a movie theatre. The best of technology is used to offer them an

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 108.

environment where the students can feel cool and hip. Large screens, sound equipment, the use of lighting, and live music dominate the scene.

The enclosed auditorium is designed like an amphitheatre. The circular stage is positioned in the center of the auditorium at the lowest level. Chairs are situated around the auditorium except for one section where there the baptismal tank and the music band is located.

The music is performed by a “praise team” who is racially diverse. Both genders are evenly represented. Interestingly, their clothing is coordinated with each other and they are positioned around the perimeter of the circular stage facing the audience. Digital screens are hanging down from the ceiling. These monitors are facing the audience around the circular stage. The words of each and every song are displayed on screens above and around the circular stage. Hymn books are unnecessary. Members of the praise team are positioned under each monitor.

As one approaches the entrance, a warm greeting is provided by a racially diverse group. They direct all who enter toward a corridor that unfolds into a circular auditorium. Even before entering, upbeat music and singing can be heard. The children are guided to their classrooms. Before the church service officially begins, announcements are made on the monitors.

When the service actually begins the praise team invites all to sing. The transition is flawless. The music lasts at least thirty minutes. Each praise team member sings under the screen. The music is so loud that the singers on stage, and no one from the audience, can be heard. The lighting is dimmed and all attention is driven to the stage. The music is professionally done and timed perfectly. There is a keyboard, several electric guitars, two

drummers, and a piano. The music is spontaneous, ready and willing to adjust to the direction of the praise leader and pastor.

At the beginning of the pastor's message, he asks the congregation to lift up their Bibles and repeat a statement of belief in the authority of Scripture. After the passionate crowd enthusiastically cooperates, they set the Bibles in their laps or on the floor and read the passage on the overhead screen. The pastor speaks on issues to which many congregants are sympathetic, as revealed by frequent head-nods, lifted hands, and words of affirmation. But soon after the beginning, the pastor often abandons his study notes in order to "speak from the heart." He claims that the Lord was guides him to do so. Reminiscent of the elite church, no one questions his authority. Scripture passages are proclaimed in the pastor's message but there is no coherent pattern to the proclamations. Historical and literary context is not considered. While his rhetoric is passionate, his major points are often disconnected from one another. But the congregation and pastor begin to mutually respond to each other with shouts of proclamations and supporting applause. However, the statements proclaimed by the pastor and heartily received by the congregation are "attitude" claims of such things as abundance, success, and peace. In essence, if we would take ownership of these positive statements, no matter how fierce and determined the opposition is, these "truths" would translate into empowering success in every aspect of our lives. They are guaranteed to work if we have enough faith. During my visit, I noted that along the edge of the circular stage the pastor would make direct eye contact with the attendees. Eye contact was very important to him.

The service always closes with an invitation to come down and experience God's blessings. The stage is soon filled with people, both the young and old. Many of those who remain in their chairs lift up their arms, pray, and sing along with the praise team who slow

the pace to a meditative style. The praise team interacts with the direction, rhetoric, and movements of the pastor. Afterwards, the service concludes with prayer and upbeat music inviting the attendees to come back next week.

2. *Deweyan analysis.* The worship service of the sensational church may primarily be described as non-aesthetic because of a two-fold imbalance. First, the sensational church is preoccupied with indulgence in activities. Second, the church activities are overly focused on excessive undergoing (receptivity), crowding as many fanciful impressions as possible into one event.<sup>184</sup> This excessive undergoing overwhelms the senses and captivates the emotions, causing people to hunger for the sensational rather than balance in experience. When people are called to publicly respond to the worship experience, then all of a sudden, the excessive undergoing dramatically shifts to excessive doing. In other words, the roles are now reversed. Here the audience's doing is governed, that is, now informed by their own undergoing. As a result, the pastor and worship team receives excessive undergoing and deficient doing. Just as the humdrum's worship service is engrossed with the non-aesthetic routine, the sensational church is preoccupied with the indulgent and is imbalanced.

a. *Strengths.* The activities of the church are commendable in many respects. We will focus on two strengths. First, the people in this church are the first to respond to crises in community. They open their doors when the community floods, go out of their way to help the misfortunate, and attempt to enrich the lives of those in their sphere of influence. They are sensitive to racial tensions and gender issues by emphasizing unity in all their activities. They are also involved in public protests, fighting against vices in our

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 46.

community, and supporting public officials such as police and fire. For them, these are expressions of worship.

Moreover, this church embraces technological changes, striving to incorporate the latest technology in their worship service and educational programs. Unlike the elite and humdrum church, it welcomes technological revolutions and assimilates new advances into the worship experience. In fact, the use of technology is striking.

Music is performed brilliantly. The interaction between the praise team and the audience is rhythmic with both feeding off of each other. Nothing would be described as mediocre. To be sure, aesthetic qualities are expressed. The greeters, musicians, praise team, and pastor are all engaged in their jobs, all interested in doing well, and seem to express genuine affection. Their body language is focused, using their whole bodies in worship, and they are able to adjust as the circumstances change under the pastor's direction. Though it seems the integral factors such as the music, setting, use of technology, and style possess aesthetic qualities, they fall short of a complete aesthetic experience because of imbalance.

b. *The problem of imbalance.* In essence, the worship experience tilts to the excessive and the focus centers on the audience experiencing and indulging in the sensational, namely, saturating the audience with sensations in order to generate an emotional response. Then suddenly, the focus dramatically changes from the excessive in receiving to excessive in responding to the service before others. The emotional response is then equated with a religious experience with God.

The aesthetics of a sensational church is cut short from maturation because what is valued is an emotional response from the congregation. The loud music, the use of colorful lights, the emotional rhetoric, the sentimental words, and the use of technology are

choreographed to provoke people to respond. Like a pep rally, the music begins very upbeat and is excitable and slowly builds up to a crescendo through the use of rhetoric and music, targeting felt needs, desires, and dreams. The crescendo is followed by an emotional release. Thus, the emotional release is considered be an encounter with God. This release becomes the overriding goal of the sensational church and entertainment, that is, using various means to hold our attention, is the means to provoke this response.<sup>185</sup>

But an emotional release of this sort should not be equated with qualitative enrichment. Dewey writes:

With respect to human emotion, an immediate discharge that is fatal to expression is detrimental to rhythm. There is no enough resistance to create tension, and thereby a periodic accumulation and release. Energy is not conserved so as to contribute too an ordered development.<sup>186</sup>

Rather, this goal is reductionistic because all aspects are singularly focusing on the build up of emotions to the neglect of other areas of personhood, such as the mind, under the guise of religious experience. Qualitative enrichment improves the whole person simultaneously, like the growth of an unborn baby; it is not merely a release of emotions.

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<sup>185</sup> I am not trivializing the importance of entertainment as a significant aspect of our lives. But my question is how does one know when the target response is directed to the emotions rather than the whole person? Am I being enriched by the experience or am I being emotionally manipulated. For example, at the beginning of sensational service, the music is clearly a performance. The lights are on the stage. Audience participation at that point is virtually unnecessary. The opening music is meant to excite us with pounding drums and praise team members jumping up and down. The only acceptable emotion is utter joy and happiness. Then near the end of the service, after the message, the intense and slower music is used, and tears begin to flow from the praise team members and the speaker. Are they manipulating us to a sort of introspection that will lead us to a public response or are they interested in authentic development? Are these emotions authentic or are they manipulated? Interestingly, the entertainment industry is not obligated to explain themselves in our Western culture. Their purpose is to evoke an emotional response for financial gain and do not stand accountable for what else they might provoke. In other words, they do not necessarily care if your life is enriched or degenerated as a result of their entertainment. While aesthetic desensitization is outside of the purpose of this work, it has relevance to the extent that churches modeling themselves after the entertainment industry. See Richard Shusterman, "Entertainment: A Question for Aesthetics" in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44:3 (2003): 289-307, for an excellent philosophical discussion regarding the classification, importance, and role of entertainment in common life. Consider this statement by Marshall McLuhan:

For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consists in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus trance. But the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact, as in the first bars of a melody [*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 30].

<sup>186</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 162.

While there are elements of passion in aesthetic perceptions, when we are overwhelmed by our passions, there is no order or balance. Instead of an appropriate dignity, a balanced sensitivity involving the whole person and the environment, there can be an unruly excitement with some people collapsing on the floor, others literally howling at the top of their lungs, running around the auditorium in circles, or are marked with uncontrollable laughing.<sup>187</sup> The lights, sounds, and scenes of the service penetrate those emotions, tipping people toward this emotional indulgence.

In contrast, consider Dewey's insight:

When complete release is postponed and is arrived at finally through a succession of ordered periods of accumulation and conservation, marked off into intervals by the recurrent pauses of balance, the manifestation of emotion becomes true expression, acquiring esthetic quality—and only then.<sup>188</sup>

The ability to induce people into such a response reaffirms how sensitive we are to our context. Though Plato and Dewey have recognized the power of aesthetics to induce emotions and displace order, the sensational church capitalizes on this relationship between people and environment in a very organized way to generate to specific conditions and promote certain results. Other churches, especially the humdrum, fail to really understand the impact that the setting makes in promoting aesthetic enrichment to the whole person.

Regarding the response to the experience, the elite church overemphasizes the private, whereas the sensational church overemphasizes the public. In other words, there is an expectation of a long line of people who have “walked the aisle” to receive prayer, power, forgiveness, or miraculous intervention. Some desire to publicly express a new decision or direction or simply to sing with lifted arms at the front rather than in their own seats. So

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 162.

the indulgence finds expression in public professions and requests. The response at the altar call affirms and justifies the pastor's message and identity even though the reaction of the congregation is not organic. Therefore, the excess in receiving throughout most of the worship service immediately shifts to becoming excess in the doing. In other words, the saturation of stimuli is meant to lead to an indulgent response, and the attention to the dramatic continues each and every week.

But we have to be careful in our analysis of indulgence lest we neglect the history of revivalism (e.g., First and Second Great Awakenings in America), Quaker worship services, and the enriching aspects of Pentecostal and charismatic movements. There is a dynamic relationship between having an emotional release and having a spiritual experience.<sup>189</sup> Thus, in our evaluations of the actual exercise of indulgent excess, we must

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<sup>189</sup>For example, consider the following response by Jonathan Edwards in his analysis and defense of intense moments of spiritual ecstasy. Edwards writes:

It is no argument that a work is not of the Spirit of God that some who are the subjects of it have been in a kind of ecstasy, wherein they have been carried beyond themselves, and have had their minds transported into a train of strong and pleasing imaginations, and a kind of visions, as though they were rapt up even to heaven and there saw glorious sights. I have been acquainted with some such instances, and I see no need of bringing in the help of the devil into the account that we give of these things, nor yet of supposing them to be of the same rapture into paradise. Human nature, under these exercises and affections, is all that need be brought into the account. If it may be well accounted for, that persons under a true sense of a glorious and wonderful greatness and excellency of divine things, and soul-ravishing views of the beauty and love of Christ, should have the strength of nature overpowered, as I have already known that it may; then I think it is not at all strange that amongst great numbers that are thus affected and overborne, there should be some persons of particular constitutions that should have their imaginations thus affected. The effect is no other than what bears a proportion and analogy to the other effects of the strong exercise of the minds. It is no wonder, when the thoughts are so fixed, and the affections so strong-and the whole soul is so engaged, ravished, and swallowed up-that all the other parts of the body are so affected, as to be deprived of their strength, and the whole frame ready to dissolve. Is it any wonder, that, in such a case, the brain in particular (especially in some constitutions), which we know is most especially affected by intense contemplations and exercises of mind, should be so affected, that its strength and spirits should for a season be diverted and taken off from impressions made on the organs of external sense, and be wholly employed in a training of pleasing delightful imaginations, corresponding with the present frame of the mind? Some are ready to interpret such things wrong, and to lay too much weight on them, as prophetic visions, divine revelations, and sometimes significations from heaven of what shall come to pass; which the issue, in some instances I have known, has shown to be otherwise. But yet, it appears to me that such things are evidently sometimes from the Spirit of God, though indirectly; that is, their extraordinary frame of mind, and that strong and lively sense of divine things which is the occasion of them, is from his Spirit; and also as the mind continues in its holy frame, and retains a divine sense of the excellency of spiritual things even in its rapture, which holy frame and sense is from the Spirit of God, though the imaginations, through the imaginations that attend are but accidental, and therefore there is a commonly something or other in them that is confused, improper, and false [Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 97-8].

investigate the end-results. For example, let us briefly consider the insights of the American philosopher Jonathan Edwards. He carefully and comprehensively examined sensational aspects of worship during and following the First Great Awakening. But what we will discover is that Edwards' judgment of these events is agreeable with Dewey's call for qualitative enrichment of the whole person if we keep the end-results in mind.

Jonathan Edwards warns against being lead by impulses and impressions and by evangelists who despise the proper role of the mind and learning.<sup>190</sup> However, he defends revivalism and the unusual emotional outbursts and responses that occur and the ways in which preachers appeal to the emotions. For instance, in *The Distinguishing Marks of the Works of the Spirit of God*, he contends that unusual signs such as trembling and passing out do not validate or invalidate the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>191</sup> He states, "Therefore it is not reasonable to determine that a work is not from God's Holy Spirit because of the extraordinary degree in which the minds of persons are influenced."<sup>192</sup> He later states, "A work is not to be judged of by any effects on the bodies of men; such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or the failing of bodily strength."<sup>193</sup> But, on the other hand, in the same work, Edwards argues that love for Jesus, mortification of worldly lusts, renunciation of sin, pursuit of and high esteem for Scripture, a sensitive accountability before God in view of their lives, and authentic Christ-like love to God and others, are distinguishing markings of the true work of the Holy Spirit.

In sum, Edwards argues that lives, which are holistically transformed by the Holy Spirit are those that receive authentic religious experiences.<sup>194</sup> In fact, he writes, "Can it

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<sup>190</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 233.

<sup>191</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival*, 75-147.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-120.

not be determined whether it [work of God] tends to awaken their consciences, or to stupefy them; whether it inclines them more to seek their salvation, or neglect it; or lead them to deism; whether it makes them have more regard for the great truths of religion, or less?"<sup>195</sup> Thus, Edwards looks at the end-results of such experiences to determine if they are beneficial to the whole person.

In a similar way, Dewey's aesthetics generates questions such as "Are people qualitatively enriched by such experiences whereby their lives are practically improved? Is there a proportional balance that nutritiously impacts the whole person, not merely one's emotions?"<sup>196</sup> Therefore, our examination into excessive indulgence must not merely involve the actual instance of overwhelming emotions but the beneficial, qualitative results that follow.

In certain traditions, such as those in African and African-American churches, the relationship between homilies, rhetorical cadence, rhythm, songs, and dance play integral

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>196</sup> In his work, *Love God with All your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, J. P. Moreland offers a helpful and logical case for the role of the mind in spiritual transformation [(Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997)]. Interestingly, Moreland states:

God is worthy of the very best efforts we can give Him in offering our respect and service through the cultivation of our total personality, including our minds. Seen in this light, dedication to intellectual growth is not merely done for the edification of the worshiper, but as an act of service rendered to God. Halfhearted study in high school or college represents a failure to grasp the fact that loving God with the mind is part of worship. Such halfhearted study is an unworthy offering to the Lord [Ibid., 159].

Later he defines worship:

Worship is the not under the control of human beings, nor is the form it takes up to their whims. Rather, worship is a response to a God who initiates toward His people, gives them life, and shows Himself active on their behalf [Ibid., 161].

One of the applications Moreland makes from his discussion about the use of the mind has bearing on our study of religious worship services. Moreland asserts:

Frequently, our worship services place worship prior to the teaching of the Word. Now there is nothing wrong with this in itself. However, if worship is response, then if a service starts with worship, the people of God have not been given something to which to respond. In my view, we ought to vary the order of our services with a time of teaching followed by congregational testimonies about how God has used the sermon topic in people's lives. Once God's people have their minds filled with truths about God, His Word, and His ways, and once they have had a chance to meditate for a moment on these truths and the way they have been applicable to someone else's life, then the congregation is prepared to respond in worship.... The emotions and will can be more sincerely and intentionally directed toward God if the mind has been given the chance to recall, understand, or reflect on truth [Ibid].

roles to experiencing meaningful expressions of worship. The use of technology such as the drums, keyboards, organ, choir, and congregational attire are all integrally relating and *contributing* to authentic worship for the whole person. While the release of emotions is critical to having an aesthetic experience, what sets these activities apart from the sensational church is that there is not only an appropriate doing and undergoing, but the authentic aesthetic experience is naturally and organically comes from within the contextual activity. In other words, the experience is not contrived or artificial, imposed upon the activity.

Moreover, unlike healthy churches, technology in sensational churches is used to induce an artificial experience of indulgence, to entertain people, saturating their senses. Therefore, because of the transactional relationship between our environment and personhood, the strategic placement and use of technology must be considered. Questions must be asked such as, “What are the purposes for the calculated use of technology?” “Is technology being used to entertain people or is it contributing to the development of the experience within the environment?” Interestingly, Marshall McLuhan claims:

With the arrival of electronic technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself. To the degree that this is so, it is a development that suggests a desperate and suicidal autoamputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism. It could be well that the successive mechanizations of the various physical organs since the invention of printing have made too violent and superstimulated a social experience for the central nervous system to endure.<sup>197</sup>

Just like the instruments of a movie theatre are adjusted appropriately to bring a target response, we must examine the purposes of technology and see how it might be better used to promote an organic aesthetic experience and not induce a simulation, a fabricated

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<sup>197</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 53.

activity upon the congregation that merely overwhelms senses and affects the emotions. All too often we can think we are having an aesthetic experience when it is one that is only simulated. This is a terrible problem because the values of aesthetic experience are being confused, if not displaced in some churches, by excessive entertainment. Like a narcotic drug, we can so easily become addicted to entertainment that we long for more of that indulgence, which is not healthy, than we do for organic aesthetic experiences. It is not a difficult step to become desensitized and even bored over time as a result of too much exposure to indulgent entertainment.

Therefore, we should not only inquire into proportionality, but critically examine the role of technology in relationship to the end-results. Is technology balanced with substantive learning? Is there proper doing and undergoing in view of technology and the senses? Stated differently, if there was a power outage, is an aesthetic experience even possible?

In sensational churches there is also an imbalance in the actual messages proclaimed. For example, when the pastor set aside his Bible and turned to statements that reflect what may be described as the actualization of positive thinking, he relegated the reality of pain, sadness, suffering, and trauma to something that is detrimental to our well-being. While suffering can not always be alleviated, it can, nevertheless, generate benefits that bring greater meaning to how we live our lives and serve our community (e.g., cancer survivor ministering to others). In contrast, healthy churches treasure authenticity, the reality of pain, and the beauty of relying upon other members to get through difficulties, whether great or small. Recovery from discontinuity generates growth. The same book of the Bible that states prayers offered in faith will make the sick person well (James 5) also declares in Chapter 1 to count it *all joy* when one encounters various trials. Therefore, positive

thinking does not take reality as it is by ignoring or reducing in importance the roles of tension and discontinuity. As a result, the benefits of suffering may be undervalued and the benefits of “American” success may be overplayed, creating an artificial setting that does not harmonize with the rest of experience in common life.

c. *The problem of reductionism.* Since the church’s singular focus is creating a dramatic experience, it neglects other relevant areas of expository teaching, church history, and systematic theology. In particular, the leadership tends to downplay the importance of the mind in favor of what they call “heart knowledge.” In other words, they focus on the subjective aspects of the Christian experience divorced from critical thinking, deliberating, and judging.

In sum, the sensational church has many aesthetic qualities, but there is no proper balance. As a result, lives are not organically enriched. Rather, like the humdrum church, the members are impoverished. The building may be huge, the music loud, the lights flashy, the images colorful, the suits sleek, and the preacher’s proclamations energetic, but in the end, the aesthetics are devoid of nutritional content because the pastor and his team primarily sought to tap into the emotions, not the whole person. As a result, their aesthetic indulgences generate suspicion in the community because they manipulate the emotions in attempt to motivate genuine life-change. Other pastors merely seek to entertain and reinforce “positive” and “non-disturbing ideas.” Still others use entertainment as an element of control. Expectations by the church leadership, such as financial giving in order to be blessed by God, even lead some to mock the church, fostering greater alienation between the church and community, even in spite of the fact that the church strives to serve

the community. Though it strives to be “relevant,” this type of church is qualitatively anemic.<sup>198</sup>

3. *Deweyan insights*. Dewey’s advice to the sensational church would be to aim for balance in both doing and receiving and appropriately engage the heart, mind, and will within a setting that does not contribute to excessiveness in worship. He would also suggest that the leadership not foster dependency upon the church service to offer an aesthetic experience. It is not necessary to have all these electronic devices, loud music, and visual stimuli, in order to have an aesthetic experience. Instead, pause and look around and experience wonder, delight, and zeal as one does in the ordinary activities, events, and scenes of life. Religious expression of worship should be an organic process and not one that is artificially induced. Lastly, like the humdrum church, the sensational church should not avoid or ignore how tension and pain can contribute to aesthetic experience. Dewey puts it this way:

Struggle and conflict may themselves be enjoyed, although they are painful, when they are experienced as means of developing an experience; members in that they carry it forward, not just because they are there. There is ...an element of undergoing, of suffering in its large sense, in every experience. Otherwise there would be no taking in of what preceded. For ‘taking in’ in any vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously unknown. It involves reconstruction which may be painful. Whether the necessary phase is by itself pleasurable or painful is a matter of particular conditions.<sup>199</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

While there are many vibrant evangelical churches today that eagerly strive to worship God and interact with community in enriching, meaningful ways, many other churches struggle to attract newcomers and grow corporately. Though they recognize the widening

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<sup>198</sup> See Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness: the Challenge to the Idol of Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003) for a thought-provoking discussion about the topic of relevance.

<sup>199</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 42.

gap, they are unwilling to change, afraid of the risk of hurting current members or attracting new members that do not “fit the mold” of what they desire.

Using Dewey’s analysis of what is and what is not aesthetic, we are able to uncover aesthetic problems that many churches face. In each of these cases studied, actions and consequences are not joined together in appropriate balance. This imbalance finds expression when the routine or sensational are valued above harmony between what we do and what we receive. As a result, aesthetic experiences are cut short from maturation. Moreover, these imbalances promote a cultural gap between the church and community because, in part, the church is not able to offer substantive aesthetic enrichment to everyone in the larger society in which it is embedded. Therefore, coupled with excesses and deficiencies, the elite, broken, humdrum, and sensational churches aggravate the cultural gap between church and community. But in turn, the gap also impacts the members themselves. It has caused frustrated people to break away from church and ways of doing church. Many are disillusioned and unfulfilled. As a result, two evangelical movements recently arose, namely, the “seeker-sensitive” critique and the “emerging” critique. We will now direct our attention and address the advantages and failures of these two critiques using Dewey’s tool of aesthetic analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### A DESCRIPTION OF TWO PERVASIVE CHURCH MOVEMENTS

The aesthetic problems in the elite, broken, humdrum, and sensational churches, such as religious activities divorced from enriching community, activity for activity sake, and sensational manipulation, have led many to conclude that the traditional ways of doing church are vacuous in addressing people's needs. The disparity between the aesthetic practices of the traditional church and community are too great and the lack of a meaningful worship experience is too profound. As a result, two new approaches have advanced in recent years: the "seeker-sensitive" movement and the subsequent "emerging church" movement(s). Both advocate reinventing and reengineering the traditional church in the United States in order to bridge the culture gap and offer consequential worship activities to new generations. These ideas are controversial, critical, and engaging. They have profound influences that cannot be ignored in any philosophical study of contemporary church aesthetics.

Our purpose is to explore these two reactions with particular attention to the ways they seek to bridge the culture gap and engage in religious activities. Therefore, in this Chapter I will describe these two approaches. I will then discuss some of the values each movement embraces. Then in the next Chapter I will use Dewey's analysis to examine the aesthetics and explain why I believe their attempts to bridge the culture gap are inadequate.

#### A. A DESCRIPTION OF THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE CHURCH

The "seeker-sensitive" approach attempts to correct the problems of traditional churches by using marketing theories to restructure the local church. For the sake of evangelism, that is, spreading the gospel message, the seeker-sensitive church attempts to be "culturally inviting." "A seeker church is one that tailors its programs and services to

attract people who are not church attenders.”<sup>200</sup> Thus, seeker churches strip traditional churches of their usual or normal aesthetics of historical and liturgical elements and ecclesiastical designs, icons, and interior structures. In place of these “barriers,” they utilize contemporary forms of worship and cutting-edge technology, target “felt-needs” (what people consciously lack and desire) through mass marketing, and restructure the design of the church to conform to the other aspects of suburban or urban life. In essence, they remove any object or design that may prove to be an obstacle to potential guests.

Bill Hybels, a 23-year-old college student and youth minister, who was disgruntled by the “staleness in traditional churches,” envisioned a church that “could speak to the contemporary concerns of suburban professionals like himself.”<sup>201</sup> He rented a movie theater on Sunday mornings and within a year his congregation grew from over 100 high school students to a congregation of 1,000 young people. The church’s name is Willow Creek Community Church. Three years later it was 3,000 people strong, and by 1994 it boasted 15,000 attendees and found itself on a 120-acre campus in an affluent Chicago suburb, South Barrington, Illinois.<sup>202</sup> It became the second-largest Protestant church in the United States with approximately a 7,000-seat auditorium and sophisticated audio-visual technology.<sup>203</sup> This church became the leader behind the seeker-sensitive movement. In 2000 Willow Creek was drawing 17,000 people a weekend.<sup>204</sup> The church now averages 23,000 attendees every weekend. In 2009 the annual budget was reported to be \$54 million

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<sup>200</sup> Kimon Howland Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 2. When asked, “What is the seeker-sensitive movement?” Bill Hybels responds by saying, “It is nothing more than a growing awareness among thousands of church leaders that local churches lost their evangelistic effectiveness many decades ago and that something should be done about it” [Michael G. Mauldin and Edward Gilbreath, “Selling Out the House of God?,” *Christianity Today* (18 July 1994): 21].

<sup>201</sup> Edward Gilbreath, “The Birth of a Megachurch,” *Christianity Today* (July 18, 1994): 23.

Lynne & Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), offers a personal account of the formation of this church and how churches can apply their unique philosophy and methodology to other congregations.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Eric Reed, “Church: Willow Creek Ready for Megagrowth” *Christianity Today* (April 24, 2000): 54.

<sup>204</sup> Gillmor, Community is Their Middle Name,” 48.

dollars.<sup>205</sup> In 2000, the church also branched out, offering four satellite campuses for those who live more than 30 minutes from the main campus.<sup>206</sup>

As a result of its incredible success in church growth, other churches began to follow and in 1991 an alliance was established among like-minded churches known as “Willow Creek Association” (WCA). By the year 2000 it was comprised of 5,600 seeker-sensitive churches in 90 denominations.<sup>207</sup> The membership by 2009 was reported to be at 12,000. This association hosts conferences, offers curriculum and materials, and provides networking resources for churches to benefit from each others’ experiences.<sup>208</sup> In fact, approximately 65,000 church leaders attend WCA conferences every year.<sup>209</sup>

In 2000 Willow Creek announced a \$70 million dollar new building project on the church’s now 155-acre suburban Chicago campus. Plans were drawn for 49,000 square foot office building, a classroom building for workshops, and a new auditorium with over 7,000 seats.<sup>210</sup> In a 2009 on-line article, the *Briefing Room* notes:

Its [Willow Creek] truly awe-inspiring auditorium boasts over 7,200 seats, which technically make it the largest theater in the world. Thanks to state-of-the-art sound, LED display, and projection systems, not one of the seats could be fairly described as ‘bad,’ a fact that makes Willow Creek’s services so engaging.”<sup>211</sup>

Hybels broke away from traditional sets of physical and visual practices of worship.

By exercising creativity, innovation, and strategy, he sought to identify, connect, and impact people who are described as the “unchurched.” These are people who are

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<sup>205</sup> William C. Symonds, “Marketing,” *Stanford Business* (February 2009): 16.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>207</sup> Gillmor, “Community Is Their Middle Name,” *Christianity Today* (November 13, 2000): 54.

<sup>208</sup> Michael S. Hamilton, “Willow Creek’s Place in History” *Christianity Today* (November 13, 2000): 67-8.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Verla Gillmor, “The Next 25 Years,” *Christianity Today* (November 13, 2000): 54.

<sup>211</sup> Heather Davis, “Daniel Subwoofers Handle the Low-End for Willow Creek Church,” *The Briefing Room*, April 14, 2009 <[www.blogsvconline.com/2009/04/14/danley-subwoofers-handle-the-low-end-for-willow-creek-church/](http://www.blogsvconline.com/2009/04/14/danley-subwoofers-handle-the-low-end-for-willow-creek-church/)>. Retrieval date: 1 June 2010.

unfamiliar, estranged, or have ill feelings toward the Christian faith. Therefore, the seeker-sensitive movement strives to change the “unchurched” perception. As a result, Sunday morning worship activity shifted from one of edifying believers to evangelism by creating an atmosphere that is culturally inviting and using various means to communicate the gospel in a manner that is entertaining. In fact, Hybels contends that Willow Creek is “following the pattern of the first-century church.”<sup>212</sup>

How Hybels restructured an evangelical worship service is interesting. Consider the following observations. Edward Gilbreath remarks:

Willow Creek does not look like ‘church.’ There are no crosses, steeples, or stained-glass windows. And the church’s weekend ‘seeker services,’ geared to attract the unchurched, dispense with reciting creeds or using hymnals and employ professional-quality drama and contemporary Christian music.<sup>213</sup>

In his 1996 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, “Welcome to the Next Church,” Charles Trueheart observes:

No spires. No crosses. No robes. No clerical collars. No hard pews. No kneelers. No biblical gobbledygook. No prayer rote. No fire, no brimstone. No pipe organ. No dreary eighteenth-century hymns. No forced solemnity. No Sunday finery. No collection plates.<sup>214</sup>

The church resembles a convention center with a large auditorium surrounded by an even larger parking lot. The buildings are similar to downtown structures; they are purposefully architecturally divorced from the historical legacy of church architecture.

There are no features that may promote barriers between church and community.

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<sup>212</sup> Gilbreath, “The Birth of a Megachurch,” 23. When asked what are the biblical marks of a healthy church, Hybels responds:

One way we describe it is that the church exists for the four-fold purpose of exaltation, evangelism, edification, and social action. Then there’s the Acts 2 model, where the first-century church devoted itself to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and Communion. Sometimes we just go down these grids looking for those marks of a biblical church, then we keep lining Willow Creek up against them to see how we’re doing [Ibid., 22].

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Charles Trueheart, “Welcome to the Next Church,” *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1996): 37-58.

In a 2000 *Christianity Today* article, “Community is their Middle Name,” Veria Gillmor notes, “The services’ ‘wow’ factor is aided by 50 vocalists, a 75 piece choir, seven rhythm bands, a 65-piece orchestra, 41 actors, a video production department, and an arts center with 200 students that serves as a farm club for future talent.”<sup>215</sup> In an Op-Ed article in the *New York Times*, columnist David Brooks describes the seeker-sensitive churches this way:

To fill the pews, they [churches] often emphasize the upbeat and the encouraging and play down the business about God’s wrath. In today’s megachurches, the technology is cutting-edge, the music is modern, the language is therapeutic, and the dress is casual. These churches are seeker-sensitive, not authoritarian.<sup>216</sup>

In order to be culturally inviting, the church produced programs around the “felt-needs” of “consumers” and used contemporary cultural ideas, lingo, and pop icons to provoke curiosity. The tremendous growth it has experienced in sheer numbers has been overwhelming. As a result, Willow Creek generated a church marketing movement phenomenon, employing professional expertise, skills, and statistics to bridge the culture gap and make a positive impact in community. In fact, many people describe the seeker-sensitive movement as “pragmatic evangelicalism.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Gillmor, “Community Is Their Middle Name,” 49.

<sup>216</sup> David Brooks, “The National Creed,” *The New York Times* (December 30, 2003), 21.

<sup>217</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 15. For example, Webber writes:

This wide spread presence of pragmatic evangelicalism has made traditional evangelicalism look like a ‘throwback to a ‘past era,’ and as the traditional church, its building, its worship, and its evangelism went into decline, so did its theology. It isn’t that the megachurch and the new evangelicalism reputed the old theology; it was more a case of the transference of interest. The theological issues of traditional evangelicalism became nonissues. The mega church, seeker tradition, contemporary worship, and the need-driven church became post-evangelical, or at least post-traditional evangelical. So pragmatic evangelicalism, responding to the unraveling of society, created new practical solutions-corporate churches, entertainment worship, need-driven programs, therapeutic faith. Theology became relevant. Pragmatics become prominent. The divorce between theology and practice was complete. Traditionalists maintained their intellectual theology, their evidential apologetics, their propositionalism, and their foundationalism. Pragmatics, on the other hand, were concerned with practice, meeting the needs of the people through a pragmatic agenda. They have drawn hundreds of thousands of converts around the world. They have instituted numerous small groups for Bible study and accountability. Their churches are thriving, welcoming, hospitable places, open to all groups, serving the needs of broken families, single mothers, abused spouses, alcoholics, drug addicts, and the aged. And these churches are to be commended for these and other successes in meeting needs [Ibid].

The “unchurched” are sure to feel comfortable and entertained and even awe-struck as they absorb the huge building, professional music, sophisticated multimedia, and skits. Non-confrontational uplifting messages that are delivered, referencing popular culture and addressing practical needs. In fact, the pastor, who is dressed in casual attire, often uses humor, skits, imagery, and music to draw upon and augment a particular point or topic(s) to be addressed. The church’s leadership believes this consumer approach attracts people who are searching for answers and brings them into a relationship with Christ. The hope is that the church can capitalize on the contagious fervor to reach out and serve the greater community.<sup>218</sup>

If we were to enter into a church like Willow Creek for the first time, we would immediately be struck by the size of the sanctuary and the large projection screens. Typically in a church like Willow Creek, soothing recorded music is playing in the background while announcements, images, and photographs are displayed on the giant screens. Reminiscent of the sensational church, the volume of music continues to build as the time of the service draws near. Then the singing begins. The volume and energy exponentially rise and the singers and musicians, who are outstanding, offer a well-produced show. The lyrics to the music are projected across the screens with images to reinforce the message. Monologues, skits, and other dramatic tools are used. Every transition is smooth. The pastor comes forward to offer an entertaining message, typically examining a conscious need or desire.<sup>219</sup> Oftentimes, he sits on a bar stool and in a friendly, endearing tone, offers an encouraging and inspiring message.

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<sup>218</sup> Matt Branaugh, “Willow Creek’s ‘Huge Shift’,” *Christianity Today* (June 2008): 13.

<sup>219</sup> Scott Thumma & Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America’s Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 149.

Unlike the church, the actual message from the pastor is not abstract, conceptual, or theoretically driven. The message is typically topical and at times expositional. It is practical in content. Self-depreciating humor and real-life stories are used. Illustrations from film, music, sports, games, and television shows are incorporated throughout the message. Cultural and political issues such as the importance of recycling may even be discussed. The pastor possesses excellent speech, an engaging personality, and a sincere disposition.

Unlike the elite, broken, humdrum, and sensational churches, seeker-sensitive churches seek to intentionally design the worship experience in a way that preserves a person's anonymity. In other words, they do not want to place the "seeker" in an awkward position. For example, the attendees are rarely asked to participate in corporate singing. In his book, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, James F. White, observes that there is very little singing by the congregation. Rather, "professional musicians provide 'entertainment evangelism' with music that resonates in nostalgic style to whatever age group is targeted."<sup>220</sup> These musicians are highly competent. In fact, the service itself is performance driven. Scott Thumma and Dave Travis note:

Within this stream [attendees are merely observers], the performance value of the worship presentation is very important. The entire worship experience includes a 'down-to-the-second' production sheet with each element carefully scripted, rehearsed, polished, and delivered on the mark during the service. Afterward, the worship leaders gather to review the experience, tweak any elements for future worship services that weekend, and learn from any glitches before the next weekend. Some of these churches have even created the staff position of 'weekend producer' to plan and execute all elements of the service.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 129. According to *Christianity Today*, Os Guinness fears that when the church embraces these tools of modernity they invite potential chaos. Guinness states:

Totally planned, professionally orchestrated, single-purposed environments' may be as 'effective' for evangelism in megachurches as they are for selling in megamalls. But when everything is controlled... who controls the church and who controls the controllers [Maudlin and Gilbreath, "Selling Out the House of God?," 21].

<sup>221</sup> Thumma & Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 149.

They also state:

The overall level of the worship experience must be perceived as excellent for the local context. The church is not only being judged in relation to other churches, but is also being compared to larger cultural criteria. In the minds of its attendees, the church's worship service is measured against nightclubs, movies, television, and entertainment venues.<sup>222</sup>

Interestingly, addressing the criticisms by representatives of traditional churches that Willow Creek is “watering down” the gospel by both making no real demands on listeners and by cultivating an entertainment atmosphere, Hybels responds:

The word *entertainment*, of course, is emotive by its nature. And yes, we do use drama, contemporary Christian music, and multi-media presentations. But they are never used for the sake of titillation. I think it's good to ask: ‘Who was the master composer? Who created the arts? Whose idea was it to communicate the truth through a wide variety of artistic genres? I think it was God.

Then why has the church narrowed its options and selected a talking head as its only form of communicating the most important message on the planet? Even though preaching is the primary way the truth of God has been and should be communicated, we add texture and feeling and perspective to it through the use of music and media and drama. And anyone who has witnessed our presentations would never use the words ‘mere entertainment.’<sup>223</sup>

James White, a professor of liturgical studies at Drew University, contends that the seeker service “may not be considered worship at all but a form of evangelism.”<sup>224</sup>

How does a church like Willow Creek go beyond attracting thousands of people with its elaborate performance-driven service to directly ministering to the needs of the people? In an investigation of seeker-sensitive megachurches like Willow Creek, John Mickelthwait and Adrian Wooldridge state, “So they have begun to adopt techniques that allow churches to be both big and small, spectacular and intimate, at the same time.”<sup>225</sup>

Willow Creek emphasizes active participation in small groups whereby interpersonal

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>223</sup> Gilbreath, “The Birth of a Megachurch,” 23.

<sup>224</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 165.

<sup>225</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of the Faith is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 187.

relationships and support may be offered to one another. This is perhaps the most important aspect of its ministry because it is in small groups, that is, gatherings composed of several people or families, where relational friendships are made, nurturing support is offered, and instruction is given.

The church also offers community-care ministries in which congregational members may serve. These include programs such as coping with divorce, career transition, marital restoration, postpartum depression, and meeting the needs of those who are physically or mentally challenged. The church also offers diverse outreach opportunities to engage and enrich the lives of those in the community who are homeless, poor, and in prison.<sup>226</sup>

For example, in the Divorce Recovery program, 450 people sign up for each 10-week session and approximately 35-40% of those attending describe themselves as seekers. Willow Creek offers more than 100 ministries with 29 of them being community-care programs.<sup>227</sup> These programs foster a sense of belonging and purpose to the attendees who are involved.

Though Willow Creek church is reported to have a staff of 200 full-time paid employees, the church largely functions by volunteers. For example, most of the church's in-depth instruction occurs in "small groups" are done by lay-leaders. This structure stands in stark contrast to the elite church. Why allow the church's activities be led by volunteers? For one, the church discovered that "service is its own reward." Trueheart notes:

What brings people to their gift of service is a desire to do something that—perhaps unlike their day job, perhaps unlike their evenings—matters. Among the things that they didn't realize they wanted when they came back to church, in the view of many people I met, was not just a changed life but the chance to change the lives of others.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Gilbreath, "The Birth of a Megachurch," 23.

<sup>227</sup> Gillmor, "Community Is Their Middle Name," 50.

<sup>228</sup> Charles Trueheart, "Welcome to the New Church," *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1996): 54.

In his sociological account of the seeker-sensitive movement, Charles Truehart declares, “Centuries of European tradition and Christian habit are deliberately being abandoned, clearing the way for new, contemporary forms of worship and belonging.”<sup>229</sup> This entirely new way of doing church is unprecedented in the history of Christian worship.

Why is this change needed? In his book, *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Leith Anderson, for example, calls the traditional church to change from being fixed on that which is theoretical and standardized, and become practical by learning how to customize to meet the needs of a particular community. Knowing the demographical and geographical context in which the community is embedded is required in order to develop a healthy strategy for change. In contrast, Anderson argues that traditional churches (e.g., the elite, broken, and humdrum) are having no effect on the world outside of their own walls. In fact, he contends that if these traditional churches cling to old ways, they will suffer decline. Death is inevitable. Therefore, he defends the reinvention of the church.<sup>230</sup>

While Bill Hybels was disenchanted and broke away from the manner in which

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 37. Truehart goes on to say:

The Next Church, as the independent and entrepreneurial congregations that are adopting these new forms might collectively be called, is drawing lots of people, including many Americans with patching or blank histories of churchgoing. It constitutes, its champions believe, a distinctly American reformulation of church life, one that transcends denominations and the bounds of traditional churchly behavior. As such, it represents something more: a reconfiguration of secular communities, not just sacred ones. Social institutions that once held civic life together—schools, families, governments, companies, neighborhoods, and even old-style churches—are not what they used to be (if ever they were what we imagined). The new congregations are reorganizing religious life to fill that void. The Next Church in its fully realized state can be the clearest approximation of community, and perhaps the most important civic structure, that a whole generation is likely to have known or likely to find anywhere in an impersonal, transient nation [Ibid., 37-8].

<sup>230</sup> Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bringing Change to Your Church to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1992), 26. For example, Anderson writes:

While the New Testament speaks often about churches, it is surprisingly silent about matters that we associate with church structure and life. There is no mention of architecture, pulpits, length of typical sermons, or rules for having a Sunday school. Little is said about style of music, order of worship, or times of church gatherings. There were no Bibles, denominations, camps, pastors’ conference or board meeting minutes. Those who strive to be New Testament churches must seek to live its principles and absolutes, not reproduce the details. We don’t know many of the details, and if we reproduced the ones we do know, we would end up with synagogues, speaking Greek, and the divisive sins of the Corinthians [Ibid].

traditional churches conducted services, he contends that he has not forsaken the church's ancient heritage. In fact, Hybels states, "We've set up all our leadership structures and goals to grow a full-functioning Acts 2 community, as opposed to just an evangelizing machine that doesn't drive the roots down deep and do all the other things it's supposed to do."<sup>231</sup> In another interview, Hybels states:

I find most traditional churches are not organized according to spiritual gifts. They don't have discipleship and small-group emphasis. I find that traditional churches do not understand or practice biblical worship. I see most traditional churches as teaching centers that seek to influence people primarily for an hour a week, as opposed to a biblically functioning community that has a full-orbed approach to bringing people to Christ, assimilating them into the body of Christ, discipling them, helping them find their spiritual gifts, and sensitizing them to the needs of the world.<sup>232</sup>

He later states:

I don't mean it to sound hostile. I think the reality is more like a continuum than polar opposites. Some traditional churches are seeker-hostile and very narrow in the scope of their ministry. There are also many traditional churches that are effective in evangelism and have well-rounded ministries, without necessarily being contemporary and seeker driven.<sup>233</sup>

How this church impacts the lives of others is interesting. Consider the testimony of Teresa Russo-Cox. Russo-Cox serves as a volunteer for the church's hairdresser ministry. When interviewed, she had been a professional hairdresser for 25 years and an educator for Paul Mitchell hair products. One day she was invited by one of her clients to join her at Willow Creek.

"I was raised Catholic but had left church," Russo-Cox says, "When I first walked into Willow, I thought, 'What is this all about? No icons? No robes?' I remember John Ortberg

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>232</sup> Mauldin and Gilbreath, "Selling Out the House of God?" 22.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

spoke on ‘Shhh, God is Speaking.’ My heart was beating fast, and I knew God was speaking to me. Right there I rededicated my life to Christ.”<sup>234</sup>

Afterwards, Russo-Cox became like a hungry baby and could not get enough “spiritual food” to make up for the previous years. Therefore, she took a class on “How to be a Contagious Christian” and one on spiritual gifts.<sup>235</sup> Interestingly, she later said that she and her husband were about to lose their home because of a bad business decision. As a result, a volunteer counselor in Willow’s “Good Sense Ministry” set them up on a budget and enabled them to get their finances under control.<sup>236</sup>

Her husband became active in the Christian Auto Repairman Serving ministry that provided 300 free car repairs. Moreover, this ministry was able to restore 120 cars out of the 1,200 that were donated to provide vehicles for needy families. On the other hand, Russo-Cox created a hairdressers ministry whereby she and thirty other professional hairdressers volunteer to wash, cut, and style hair for abused and battered women and for women who are alone and pregnant, as well as for homeless people.<sup>237</sup>

Therefore, this story and thousands like them reveal the purpose behind the seeker-sensitive movement and its incredible success in view of the thousands of people who attend every week:

The idea behind all this was to create a kind of nondenominational church that would use an interesting program and comfortable surroundings to draw in the unchurched. Once drawn in, they would be enveloped in a comprehensive network of activities designed to give them a supportive community and deeper instruction in the Christian faith.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Hamilton, “Willow Creek’s Place in History,” 62-3.

Its success is often attributed to its innovation and ability to target felt-needs. One editorial put it this way:

The modern megachurch is now famous for ‘innovation’ and ‘growth through strategies, programs, tools, and resources’ so that the churches can ‘multiply their impact.’ That’s the reason for its success in America, where business principles and organizational techniques sit atop the altar of Success. These principles have indeed led to many Americans being brought into the kingdom of God.<sup>239</sup>

But it does not merely seek to target needs. Rather, the church capitalizes on vision, experimentation, and re-evaluation. Like a successful business, the leadership will cast a vision. They will experiment and see if this direction or program produces benefits. If a particular program does not produce growth, the leadership will evaluate the program and tweak it if possible. But if these adjustments do not create productive growth, the program is terminated. In fact, any program that merely subsists will be stopped even to the chagrin of those who are involved in it.

We will now extrapolate three values from this description of the seeker-sensitive movement. First, this movement seeks to mirror activities that the community values. Secondly, it values creative ways to attract people to the church. Lastly, it values experimentation to produce better results, for its focus is on growth. Let us now discuss these values before we turn our attention to the pluralistic emerging movement.

1. *Mirror the community.* The manner in which seeker-sensitive churches seek to be culturally inviting is by reflecting what is familiar outside of the church. For example, the architecture, music style, entertainment, technology, and other activities are indistinguishable from the community. Unlike a Gothic cathedral, for example, there is no novelty. In an effort to be non-threatening and shake the poor connotations many hold of

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<sup>239</sup> Editorial, “Mega-Mirror: Mega Churches are not the answer or the problem,” *Christianity Today* (August 2009): 20.

the traditional church, the same message of old is repackaged with contemporary décor to reach greater numbers. The look, sound, and feel of these churches reflects what is seen, heard, and felt in other inviting, popular, nonreligious places of the culture.

2. *Commercialize the church.* The seeker-sensitive church actively seeks to find the most creative, innovative, and irresistible ways to attract people to the church targeting felt-needs. These types of churches are “artful practitioners” of commerce.<sup>240</sup> David F. Wells puts it this way, “The marketing of the faith now seems so natural because the spiritual and the material markets have come to resemble one another.”<sup>241</sup> In essence, the church as an *institution* is responding “to today’s consumerist ethos.”<sup>242</sup> Interestingly, the church will even “use branding to expand their market share: Willow Creek finished in the top 5 percent of one survey of 250 major American brands.”<sup>243</sup>

3. *Focus is on growth.* The seeker-sensitive church continually experiments, evaluates, reflects, and strives to think “outside of the box” in order to achieve growth and generate benefits for both attendees and community. Thus, the seeker-sensitive church uses business theory, strategic planning, and visionary thinking to maximize its present ministry while anticipating and meeting future needs. In fact, Mickelthwait and Wooldridge discovered that even businesses are learning about marketing strategies from the religious sector. They write:

The management thinker Peter Drucker used to point out that these churches are superb at motivating their employees and volunteers, and superb, also at transforming

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<sup>240</sup> David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2005), 283.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. Wells notes:

The line between faith and retailing, business and belief, the Church and the world has been under steady assault in evangelicalism for many years. Examples of the blurring of the line can be found not only in these seeker churches but on all sides—in Christian music, in Christian bookstores, and in those Christian churches which are not only marketing the faith but also facilitating the sale of life insurance, vacation packages, and hair styling, to name but a few [Ibid].

<sup>242</sup> Sargeant, *Seeker Churches*, 11; Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, 281.

<sup>243</sup> Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 188.

volunteers from well-meaning amateurs into disciplined professionals. The best churches have discovered the secret of low-cost and self-sustaining growth—transforming seekers into Evangelicals who will then go out and recruit more seekers. How many businesses could boast such committed customers?<sup>244</sup>

Interestingly, according to Thumma and Travis, in a 2005 survey of mega-churches like Willow Creek, only 15% of them have not changed their format or style in the past five years. In contrast, 60% said one or more of their weekend services have changed “somewhat” or “a lot.”<sup>245</sup>

Having described how the seeker-sensitive movement seeks to bridge the culture gap and engage in aesthetic activities we will now direct our attention to a description of the emerging church movement(s) and its values. This pluralistic movement champions that which is experiential, pluralistic, and sensory. In fact, of all the churches we have examined, emerging churches are the most difficult to pin down given their emphasis on particular contextualization, creativity, spontaneity, and pluralistic practices in order to bridge the culture gap and offer a meaningful worship experience to their community each and every week.

## B. A DESCRIPTION OF THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging movement(s) is a mindset that strives for an “incarnational” way of “becoming.” An incarnational mindset is seeking to specifically identify with Jesus Christ in word, action, and lifestyle. Emerging churches believe that imitating Christ is how the church is to be, live, and have its becoming, especially because many emerging leaders declare that we live in a “post-Christian culture,” that is, a society where the Christian consensus no longer remains in terms of values, customs, and habitual practices. As a

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 155.

result, emerging churches see themselves as being intentionally missional by means of nature and function. In other words, they consider the church to be a “verb,” namely, “community in Christ-like action,” and not a “noun,” that is, a place where believers attend. To them, a church that is a “noun” is reflective of traditional and seeker-sensitive churches.<sup>246</sup>

Being “missionally minded” also involves particular contextualization, that is, adjusting to the interests, needs, and practices that is reflective of the church’s specific cultural and social context. Given the amount of sub-cultures that exist in this pluralistic society, how each emerging church relates within its particular context may greatly differ. As a result, certain aesthetic practices and rituals may vary from one emerging church to another. For example, an emerging church may adapt its activities to reflect a neighborhood that is largely composed of Chinese-Americans.

Therefore, emerging churches are diverse because of the sensitivity to the particular contexts in which they are embedded. Because this is a recent expression in Christian thought and practice, these groups are developing as they learn about themselves in relation to the particular historical, situational, and social contexts. They are also experimental for each particular church may continually change its emphasis, worship experience, and activities. A general sense of openness to creative expressions of worship mark this movement, as it sees itself as an organic expression of the Christian life in a culture that continues to change.

Lastly, emerging churches value community in terms of authenticity and shared experience, whereby both “belief” and “belonging” are integrated together. In other words,

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<sup>246</sup> For the purposes of simplicity and coherency, I will continue to use “church” to mean an assembly in this and all later chapters.

they want to create contextualized communities of faith where honest questions may be asked, where interpersonal relationships are meaningfully constructed, and where presuppositions and pre-understandings may honestly be evaluated within the context of genuine, humble dialogue. Presuppositions are fixed biases that do not change unless extreme pressure is applied and pre-understandings are moldable fluid-like influences that come and go. Dialogues or “conversations” of this sort occur with the recognition that we are within and not above culture. We are finite creatures within a larger universe and are real people, not mere products. Being made in the image of God involves such factors as personality (e.g., intellect, will, and emotion), stewardship, interpersonal relationships, and divine representation. In other words, like an ambassador representing the interests of his government in a foreign land, we are called to be God’s representatives who represent His interests on earth. Thus, authenticity and evaluation all take place together in an experiential and incarnational context. These are all aspects of what may be described as community worship.

We will begin by defining the term “emerging” and how this sociological word became identified with a church movement. We will then consider the origins of the movement followed by the various types of emerging churches. Afterwards, we will synthesize some of these churches’ aesthetic values.

1. *The Meaning of “emerging.”* The term, “emerging,” is both a difficult term to define and a very complex phenomenon. Hence, any description of this term is limiting because emerging churches are so diverse, and also because they are a recent development.<sup>247</sup> Notwithstanding these difficulties, three judgments stand out.

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<sup>247</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), offers a helpful definition of the emerging church:

First, the term “emerging” finds sociological expression in the groundbreaking work of Jeffrey Jensen Arnett.<sup>248</sup> In essence, psychologist Arnett discovered a new and distinct period of human development in our culture that he identifies as “Emerging Adulthood.” Too old to be described as adolescents, but not having accepted the responsibilities normative to adulthood, emerging adults are between the ages of 18-29. Arnett’s conclusions are helpful in understanding the contemporary culture gap between churches and community. But his findings also explain why emerging churches are very critical of the internal structures, activities, goals, and interests of both traditional and seeker-sensitive churches.<sup>249</sup>

Reflective of Taylor’s insights about the current trends in our culture, Arnett’s empirical studies discovered that 22% of emerging adults embrace either atheism, that is, they plainly reject any belief in God, or agnosticism, meaning, they are unsure about what to believe about religious questions.<sup>250</sup> On the other hand, 28% of emerging adults embrace

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Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity (6) participate as producers (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities [Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* (February 2007) 35].

<sup>248</sup> See Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>249</sup> In his book, *The Deep Church*, Jim Belcher concludes from his survey of emerging churches that this movement(s) is critical of traditional and seeker-sensitive churches’ integration of the following seven outdated and abusive ideas: (1) captivity to Enlightenment (basing truth on natural reason and not revelation; championing individualism, rationalism, and pragmatism and the justification of their positions on the basis of the self-evident truth of reason and common sense); (2) poor emphasis on consistent and meaningful Christian living (sanctification); (3) theological belief before belonging, that is, a person must possess correct theology before one can be accepted and ministered to by the community; (4) un-contextualized worship that is, using music and practicing activities that do not speak to the particular culture in which churches are situated; (5) ineffective preaching, that is, didactic teaching from a singular authoritarian voice; (6) weak ecclesiology whereby the church is more concerned with its form than with its mission. In other words, the church is more of an institutional authority concerned more about protecting its assets and preserving its traditions; (7) sectarian position in community [*The Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 41-3]. The traditional church is “known for what it is against more than what it is for” [Ibid., 43].

<sup>250</sup> Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 167.

deism, 27% consider themselves to be liberal believers, and 23% claim they are conservative believers.<sup>251</sup>

Arnett also discovered a minimal connection to the religious beliefs emerging adults received when they were children and adolescents. In essence, emerging adults are determined to think for themselves. They want to make their own decisions about religious belief.<sup>252</sup> One reason why religious training in childhood and adolescence makes so little difference in their lives is that, "...in the course of growing up, people gradually become exposed to more and more influences and ideas outside of the family."<sup>253</sup>

Emerging adult religious beliefs are often diverse because the individuals value the notion of constructing or embracing their own set of religious beliefs instead of receiving dogma. In fact, for emerging adults, constructing a set of religious beliefs is a personal responsibility. Being skeptical of religious institutions, emerging adults "...tend to personalize their relationship with God in a way that makes participating in organized religion unnecessary or even an impediment to the expression of their beliefs."<sup>254</sup>

Even though, for many emerging adults, individual happiness means gaining a broad range of life experiences, Arnett also discerned many of them have life-goals that reflect collectivist values such as generosity, loyalty, and self-sacrifice with family and community in view.<sup>255</sup> In fact, both individualism and collectivistic notions are not assumed to be in conflict with one another.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Arnett states that emerging adults are declare deism as a "general belief in god or a 'higher power' or 'spirituality,' but only in a general sense, not in the context of any religious tradition" [Ibid., 169]. Liberal believers, share the deist's skepticism of organized religion and accepting of different believes, yet describe themselves as members of a specific religious tradition such as Catholicism, Baptist, or Jewish [Ibid., 170]. In contrast, emerging adults who are conservative believers express beliefs in the doctrinal traditions of organized religion [Ibid].

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 174-7

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 180-7.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 183.

Second, associated with above, “emerging” refers to a generation of people who are born or raised in a culture, which considers the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment (namely the emphasis upon reason and science alone to create better people and better society) to be philosophically and existentially bankrupt.<sup>257</sup> Instead, ideas are being cultivated having roots in Romanticism. The celebration of spirituality, the power of the imagination, the elimination of separate categories in favor of unity, and the largeness of reality are a few examples of this resurgence. These ideas stand in contrast to one who desires to “hold knowledge in the structures of human rationality (with or without God).”<sup>258</sup> Though emerging churches differ greatly church-to-church, emerging adults share this Romantic mindset. Taylor describes them as “seekers.”<sup>259</sup>

2. *Emerging churches against “modernistic” evangelicalism.* Emerging churches find themselves at odds with both seeker-sensitive and traditional churches. They are opposed to both because, in part, the framework, thought, and activities of these institutions are integrated with Enlightenment ideas, and thus, are considered to be foreign to Scripture. For example, the idea that theology can be built upon mind’s rational ability to perceive totalizing knowledge with certainty outside of the historical process as unconditioned specialists are modernistic assumptions and need to be rejected. Not surprisingly, emerging churches have a distrust of modernistic claims of theological knowledge. But

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<sup>257</sup> For example, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis, 1984); Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992). I have come to discover that this popular claim we are now living in a postmodern culture is an exaggeration. This is substantiated, for example, by the popularity of books written by naturalists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens and the existence of communities that espouse foundationalism, namely, that all knowledge is ultimately supported on a basis or foundation of justified belief.

<sup>258</sup> Following Os Guinness, a careful distinction needs to be made between “modernism” and “modernity.” He understands modernism to be a philosophical idea whereas modernity refers to structural developments in areas such as technology and medicine [Mars Hill Interview, “Calling, Postmodernism, and Chastened Liberals: A Conversation with Os Guinness,” *Mars Hill Review*, no. 8 (Summer 1997): 69-82].

<sup>259</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*, 25.

that does not mean emerging churches declare all interpretations are invalid. Stanley Grenz puts it this way:

Ultimately the metanarrative we proclaim lies beyond the pale of reason to discover or to evaluate. Therefore, we agree that in this world we will witness and struggle among narratives and interpretations of reality. But we add that although all interpretations are in some sense invalid, they cannot be *equally* invalid.<sup>260</sup>

According to *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches*, we have entered into a decisive era marked by a secular upheaval, replacing the values of the old civic order with a new one. The values generated in the 1960s are so strongly identified with dysfunction and cultural decadence, they are no longer considered viable for positive change. As a result, young generations of people, some even identifying themselves as “post-evangelical,” are turning away from organized institutions that embody Enlightenment practices such as individualistic focus, systematic doctrinal formulations, and passive participation. Likewise, they are also rejecting seeker-oriented churches that focus on felt-need programs, are performance driven, or reduce personhood to commodities or numbers.<sup>261</sup>

Consider the following two examples. In his book, *Divine Commodity*, Sky Jethani, captures this anti-sensitive-seeker sentiment well when he states:

Not long ago I was attending a ministry conference at a very large church. The setting was impressive by any measure. The mammoth auditorium sat thousands in cushioned theater seats rising heavenward. Where I looked a dozen flat-panel displays crammed

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<sup>260</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 164-5. See also Stanley J. Grenz & John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Approach for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993); Brian D. Ingrassia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1995); Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

The descriptive term, “post-evangelical,” is used to refer to their Christian faith after deconstructionism is applied to strip evangelicalism of its modernistic mindset and approaches to Christian theology and practice. How this is done is, in part, by examining Christian theology and practice for prejudices, totalizing claims, and social structures of control. For example, the theological doctrine inerrancy does not sufficiently express the truth about the Bible [Scot McKnight, “The Ironic Faith of Emergents,” *Christianity Today* (September 2008): 62.

my field of vision with presenters flashing their high-definition smiles. And the stage was alike, a mechanical beast to behold. It was moving fluidly, breathing smoke, and shooting lasers through its digital chameleon skin. The band members were spread across the platform as jagged teeth in the beast's mouth, and the drummer was precariously suspended from the ceiling like a pagan offering. But even this spectacle could not hold me. In fact, with each passing minute I felt a growing need to escape.<sup>262</sup>

He then leaves the auditorium and walks out to the balcony to be by himself.

It was dusk. The moon was low on the horizon and the first stars were appearing. With the beauty of creation unfurled before me, and the glitz of American Christianity behind me, I began to ponder: *Is this what Jesus envisioned? Is this why he came, and suffered, and died? Is this why he conquered death and evil, so that we might congregate for multimedia worship extravaganzas in his name?* On that balcony, taking the chilled air into my body and watching the stars appear, I met with God in silence-my questions filling the space between us.<sup>263</sup>

The second example flows out of a conversation I enjoyed with a former seeker-sensitive pastor. This dynamic, now emerging, leader explained to me that when he first planted a seeker-sensitive church outside of San Antonio, it was a tremendous success. The church dramatically grew and, within two years, had two services every Sunday morning. People's needs were met and God was glorified. But when he later attempted the same method in North Texas several years later, the church plant failed. Why? First, he did not take into account the particular context in which he sought to plant the church. And second, culture itself had changed. He eventually came to the conclusion that the seeker-sensitive approach reduces people to a product. Under a mechanical, modernistic machine, it not only offers a product, but people become a product. Once the product conforms, then it (he or she) will bring other people to the church to become products themselves. Having recognized these issues, he is now a pastor of an emerging ministry. Even now he is exploring how the church may implement practices of monasticism (e.g., The Benedictine

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

Order) in a way that expresses a commitment to contemplation, community, and missions.

The traditional church, like the seeker-sensitive model, is also a target for criticism as it is an institutionalized construct of religion, captive to modernistic assumptions and practices. For example, in Doug Pagitt's *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith*, the author contends that traditional preaching is not only generated from the Enlightenment ideas and practices, such as an overconfidence by the preacher to know absolute truth that transcends all contexts, but is both dogmatic and dehumanizing since it sets the pastor above the people as *the expert*.<sup>264</sup> Instead, Pagitt contends that the pastor is just one of many voices in the Christian community since all Christians are "believer-priests," possess the Bible, and have the Holy Spirit to guide them.

In sum, emerging leaders believe these modernistic, traditional churches champion privatized faith over authentic community. They disproportionally focused on doctrinal content over practical application. In fact, spiritual formation is reduced to head knowledge. As a result, needs of the whole person remain unmet and the community is not served. In order to even be welcomed into a church, one must first embrace "correct theology." They typically make no serious attempt to speak to the present culture. Rather traditional churches are opposed to culture, perhaps better known for what they stand against than what they stand for.

### 3. *Emerging churches against traditional understanding of church community.*

Emerging churches find both the traditional church and seeker-sensitive church to be more concerned with form than mission. In other words, focus is directed more toward institutional authority and preservation than toward begin being an "incarnational witness"

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<sup>264</sup> Belcher, *The Deep Church*, 146-7.

to culture.<sup>265</sup> Modernistic churches are only talking to themselves, unable to change anything or anyone by their own teachings while culture has changed. Willfully or non-willfully failing to adapt, what they offer does not minister the whole person.

Moreover, people are more than products. They are hungering for rich experiences, opportunities for participation, and intimate connectivity. In his research, Wade Roof Clark discovered 40% of those who describe themselves as “born again believers” are open to a dialogical setting where questions and doubts are seriously discussed. He goes on to say, “A surprising number of them actually identify themselves as ‘seekers,’ saying they believe in God but are not sure about organized religion (meaning churches as they have known them), or raise serious questions about the truthfulness of Christianity itself.”<sup>266</sup>

Why are people hungering for such things as connectivity? In his work, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World*, emerging leader, Leonard Sweet, observes that technology (e.g., internet) is contributing to interpersonal alienation, disconnectedness, and sterility. He says:

The more wired to the world our electronic cottages (castles?) become, the more the church will need to be a place that can form authentic community where individuals can be free to be themselves. The more connected we become electronically, the more disconnected we can become personally.<sup>267</sup>

While I do agree with Sweet’s statement, I would also add that people like Christopher Lasch concluded two decades earlier the decline of family importance in our society also generated these same problems, both psychologically and socially (e.g., inauthenticity,

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 41-3.

<sup>266</sup> Wade Roof Clark, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 189.

<sup>267</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 115.

inner emptiness).<sup>268</sup> Coupled with narcissistic issues such as an awareness of separation and helplessness, the need for belonging, and the source of gratification outside of us (a psychoanalysis idea), connectivity is an ongoing need and emphasis to this generation.<sup>269</sup>

Therefore, emerging churches in North America contend that both seeker-sensitive churches and traditional churches are no longer effective in bridging the culture gap. To them, both types of churches do not recognize that our Western culture is now “post-Christian” and in many ways has rejected institutionalized religion and Enlightenment assumptions (e.g., that we can obtain neutral knowledge), considering them to be philosophically and existentially bankrupt. They are powerless to reach a new generation that has been born and raised, valuing such notions as authenticity, particular contextualization, spirituality, and tolerance.<sup>270</sup> Essentially, emerging churches are seeking to be pre-modern in thought and practice, that is, looking beyond rational knowledge for

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<sup>268</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 239. Interestingly, Lasch writes:

Narcissists may have paid more attention to their own needs than to those of others, but self-love and self-aggrandizement did not impress me as their most important characteristics. These qualities implied a strong, stable sense of selfhood, whereas narcissists suffered from a feeling of inauthenticity and inner emptiness. They found it difficult to make connection with the world. At its most extreme, their condition approximated that of Kaspar Hauser, the nineteenth-century German foundling raised in solitary confinement, whose ‘impoverished relations with his cultural environment,’ according to the psychoanalysis Alexander Mitscherlich, left him with a feeling of being utterly at life’s mercy [Ibid., 239-40].

After further reflection on Freud’s insights on narcissism, Lasch goes on to say:

The best hope of emotional maturity, then, appears to lie in a recognition of our need for and dependence on people who nevertheless remain separate from ourselves and refuse to submit to our whims. It lies in a recognition of others not as projections of our own desires but as independent beings with desires of their own. More broadly, it lies in acceptance of our limits. The world does not exist merely to satisfy our desires; it is a world in which we can find pleasure and meaning, once we understand that others too have a right to these goods. Psychoanalysis confirms the ancient religious insight that the only way to achieve happiness is to accept limitations in a spirit of gratitude and contrition instead of attempting to annul those limitations or bitterly resenting them [Ibid., 242].

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 241-2.

<sup>270</sup> Interestingly, in her book, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-and More Miserable than Ever Before*, Jean Twenge, a sociology professor at San Diego State University, empirically concludes that our culture has so concentrated on “self-esteem” issues that children born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a generation of people with narcissistic mindsets [(New York: Free Press, 2007), 1-15].

God and a meaningful life.<sup>271</sup>

As a result, emerging churches are advocating an “agents of Christ” approach to church, community, and culture at large, seeking to find relational ways in which authenticity, wholeness, and meaning may be expressed against the daily grind of alienation, disconnectedness, and oppression. Just as Jesus Christ ministered in a non-Christian, pluralistic culture, they seek to follow his example in a post-Christian, pluralist culture as participants in community, not merely as isolated individuals.

4. *The origins of the emerging movement.* The emerging church in the United States finds its origins in a Young Pastor’s Conference in the late 1990s. Organized by Bob Buford and the Leadership Network, the goal was to bring young pastors together to discuss the cultural change and how churches might meet those changes. Mark Driscoll, founder of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, gave a presentation about the cultural emergence of and identification with postmodernism among Generation X (a descriptive title to refer to the generation of people born between 1961 and 1981). From this conference of young pastors the emerging movement in the United States was

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<sup>271</sup> Joseph Bottum’s article, “Christians and Postmoderns” offers helpful insight in understanding the philosophical definitions of these overused and plastic terms, “premodern,” “modern,” and “postmodern.” He writes:

It is premodern to seek beyond rational knowledge for God; it is modern to desire to hold knowledge in the structures of human rationality (with or without God); it is postmodern to see the impossibility of such knowledge. The premoderns said that without God there would be knowledge, and the postmoderns said we have no God and have no knowledge. The premoderns said that without the purposefulness of final causation, all things would be equally valueless, and the postmoderns say there is no purpose and no value. The premoderns said that without an identity of reality and the Good, there would be no right or wrong, and the postmoderns say there is neither Good nor right and wrong. Though they disagree on whether God exists, premoderns and postmoderns share the major premise that knowing requires his existence. Only for a brief period in the history of the West—the period of modern times—did anyone seriously suppose that human beings could knowledge without God.

But then Bottum goes on to claim:

By itself, this parallel between premodern and postmodern does us no good, for we cannot use it to return to the age of faith. Postmodernity is still in the line of modernity, as rebellion against rebellion is still rebellion, as an act on the constraints of grammar must still be written in grammatical senses, as a skeptical argument against the structures of rationality must still be put rationally. Our conceptions of the premodern and the postmodern turn equally on the modern project. Though the postmodern attack on modernity may move our historical imagination to a periphery from which to view the center, it does not remove us from the circle. The failure of the present age is not cured by recognizing it as failing. We need, rather, a different center in order to hold knowledge [Ibid., 44].

conceived.<sup>272</sup> Even though Driscoll eventually distanced himself from the Leadership Network (later called the Young Leader Network) because other members of the group were contending for a theological agenda that troubled him (e.g., low view of Scripture), other dynamic leaders, such as Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, Brian McClaren, and Doug Pagitt, contributed to the movement's attractiveness, influence, and growth.

While the emerging movement offers a way of looking at the Christian faith, it is not centralized with an institutional focus. Instead, various "streams" of emerging movements exist, all discussing how Christian leaders should "do church" in a post-Christian culture. While the general desire is to bridge the culture gap and minister to the needs of post-Christian culture as Christ-centered Christians, emerging churches vary greatly in their given approach. Therefore, it is impossible to sufficiently categorize the activities of the emerging church because they are so contextually driven. Notwithstanding, Doug Pagitt offers a helpful tool of analysis. Emerging churches seek to minister *to* postmoderns, others *with* postmoderns, and others *as* postmoderns.<sup>273</sup>

5. *Three types of emerging churches.* As we begin to explore these various types of emerging churches, we need to recognize not all emerging leaders and/or emerging churches are using the term "postmodernism" to refer to philosophical postmodernism, an aspect of continental philosophy.<sup>274</sup> Many of them use this term to literally mean "after-modernism." In other words, emerging from the cultural insolvency of modernism is a generation of people who tend to be experiential, inclusive, and pluralistic, following the

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<sup>272</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 15-6.

<sup>273</sup> Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," 37. McKnight describes postmodernism this way: Postmodernity cannot be reduced to the denial of truth. Instead, it is the collapse of inherited metanarratives (over-arching explanations of life) like those of science or Marxism. Why have they collapsed? Because of the impossibility of getting outside their assumptions [Ibid., 36].

<sup>274</sup> David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996), 1.

intellectual bankruptcy of modernism. While this does not necessarily mean that modernism is dead, it does mean that the emerging adulthood generation questions or rejects this worldview and even blames it for some of the great ills of our society. So, the term, a “postmodern evangelical,” may be a declaration against modernism without necessarily commitment to the postmodern ideas of people like Jacques Derrida.

Emerging churches question and challenge long-held assumptions, convictions, and human authorities and emphasize how our environment, biases, and influences affect the way one comes to, understands, and embraces a particular belief. Though emerging churches seek to dismantle the Enlightenment in Christian thought and practice, this does not necessarily mean *every* emerging church embedded in a particular community believes absolute truth does not exist or that people are determined by their subculture.

For example, a church worship experience may entail people sitting around a circle. The pastor offers a provocative message in order to provide an occasion to uncover fixed biases. He may encourage dialogical conversation, that is, teaching by discussion, or may even publicly share his own doubts or questions about a long-held belief and speculate whether this belief is truly biblical. At other times, this corporate activity may take place over a meal, coffee, or even a *hooka*. But what is important is to cause those in attendance to re-evaluate what they believe, why they believe it, and move them to look at truth in a different way.

The examination of the doctrinal statements, values, or instruction among emerging churches shows many of them openly proclaiming that the Bible is divine and special revelation, and redemption is the grand-meta-narrative of the Bible. They also wholeheartedly reject cultural and moral relativism. They are not opposed to transcendental truth and transcendental standpoints (e.g., Bible) and take seriously the history of Christian

thought and practice with many emerging churches integrating ideas and activities from Patristic and Reformation eras. Moreover, emerging churches advocate the possibility of change, personal responsibility, as well as the social responsibility to make a significant difference in the lives of others. Therefore, it is a mistake to assert all emerging churches embrace philosophical postmodernism.<sup>275</sup> For example, Mark Driscoll, states:

No one is born with a clear comprehension of who God is... But God has chosen to lift the fog of human speculation with divine revelation. Whereas speculation is the human attempt to comprehend God, revelation is God's communication to humanity with clarity that is otherwise impossible.<sup>276</sup>

He later states:

Scripture themselves teach that they are best understood by being in Christian community. Also, since the church includes all the saints from all ages, we are wise to study the Scripture by learning from the great legacy of teachers who have gone before us, such as Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley.  
...Therefore, the key to properly understanding Scripture is to come with a humility that is willing to repent of sin and reorient life toward God's commands.<sup>277</sup>

As we will see, Driscoll does not speak for all emerging churches, as some clearly incorporate some of the insights or tools from the philosophical critique of modernism by philosophical postmodernists. Moreover, one stream of the emerging movement embraces philosophical postmodernism, using the term "emergent" to describe its followers. Emergent leaders go as far as to, "impose on the text cultural meanings and desires that ignore or alter the meaning of the Scripture altogether."<sup>278</sup> As a result, emerging leaders

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<sup>275</sup> Interestingly, in their work, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Should Be*, Kevin DeYoung and Ted Cluck contend that the most radical stream of emerging churches, known as emergent, are not philosophically postmodern. Rather, their root problem is resistance to biblical authority. Instead, they are simply a new expression of modernism [(Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 160-66]. They say, "many of the leading books display a familiar combination of social gospel liberalism, a neo-orthodox view of Scripture, a post-Enlightenment disdain for hell, the wrath of God, propositional revelation, propitiation, anything more than a vague, moralistic, warmhearted, adoctrinal Christianity" [Ibid., 160].

<sup>276</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 22.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

like Mark Driscoll react by noting that the “interpreter is elevated in authority over the text of Scripture, no longer humbly coming under Scripture...”<sup>279</sup>

Emerging churches that “minister to postmoderns,” perhaps known best as “relevants,” seek to restructure the aesthetics of the worship experience and church leadership style. In other words, they seek to be “relevant” in their activities and leadership but not change their commitment to evangelical theology and the role of the local church as an institutional authority.<sup>280</sup> An example of this type of church is Mars Hill Church where Mark Driscoll serves as pastor and founder since 1996.

How these types of churches seek to be relevant differ from one another. Some churches may involve changing the design of the auditorium or sanctuary altogether. Instead of pews facing a lectern, the church auditorium may look more like a coffee house with chairs and couches facing each other so that authenticity, interpersonal conversations, and community may be promoted. Pews facing a lectern, for example, promote disconnectedness, isolation, and instruction that is mindful of modernistic impulses that have dominated both traditional and seeker-sensitive churches (e.g., centralized authoritarianism, institutional authority, and instructional passivity). Other churches may have folding chairs facing a lectern, offer contemporary worship, use technology, and offer topics that are relevant by nature, speaking to the whole person.

Emerging churches that “minister with postmoderns” are “reconstructionists.” They are not only interested in reaching out to postmoderns, but they are also reconsidering the nature of the church and its structures. They often find that traditional and seeker churches

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

For instance, Doug Pagitt, *Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Belcher, *The Deep Church*, 45.

are both unbiblical and irrelevant to address cultural change. For example, these two types of churches look more like hierarchical organizations, protective of their rights and privileges, and less like Jesus Christ as being servant-leaders to the community. Caught up in arbitrary social formalities and authority structures, these traditional churches do not embody the disposition of Jesus Christ whereby humility is exercised, the needs of others come first, and Christian practice is emphasized.<sup>281</sup>

Reconstructionist-type emerging churches often turn to other expressions of worship such as those practiced in the first three centuries of the Christian church (before Roman Emperor Constantine). As a result, Christian worship primarily revolves around house churches or monastic-type communities, but not centralized institutions. Following the examples of the early church or monastic orders (e.g., Benedictine; Franciscan) reconstructionists stress an incarnational (servant) lifestyle in community and advocate ancient liturgies and practices that speak to the whole person.

For example, in ancient Christian literature, such as Justin Martyr's *First Apology* and Tertullian's *Apologeticum*, we have records of ancient liturgical worship. The documents reveal that the order of worship involved biblical readings, homilies, prayers of intercession, presentation of the bread and mixed cup of wine and water, Eucharistic prayer, reception of communion, collection for the support of widows and orphans, and taking communion to those unable to be present. Therefore, people like Robert E. Webber are advocating what he describes as "ancient-future worship."<sup>282</sup> This will be discussed in more length in the next chapter.

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<sup>281</sup> Belcher, *The Deep Church*, 46.

<sup>282</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Christianity: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008).

But what is central to reconstructionist-type churches is the observation that there is no single prescriptive tradition of worship. For example, in his article, “The Apostolic Tradition,” Maxwell E. Johnson observes:

That is, the history of Christian worship in these centuries is not the history of a *single* [his italics] tradition of worship that undergirds the diversity of liturgical practices stemming from some pristine, unitive, or ‘apostolic’ core; rather, it is itself the history of a plurality of liturgical practices from the very beginning. There is no clearly deduced ‘apostolic tradition’ of Christian worship, but, as we have seen, a variety of tradition. . . . What we see instead in these centuries is not a single tradition of Christian worship ready-made or fully formed in a tightly constructed package to be handed on unchanged to subsequent generations of the church. Rather, what is encountered here is what we might call various building blocks of that ‘tradition’ in development. And it is from these building blocks that the Church in subsequent generations throughout history, both through evolution in continuity with these centuries and by means of occasional revolution or reform in discontinuity, will pick and choose as it seeks to understand and express its ecclesial identity liturgically within changed historical, social, and cultural contexts in order to continue being faithful to the gospel.<sup>283</sup>

For example, in one reconstructionist-emerging church, the religious service integrates early church liturgy and provocative sermons. After the message, the pastor invites the attendees to go to stations that have been set up at different locations around the church. One station may be labyrinth where one can meditate. Another station may be a place where people can write letters to God as an expression of worship. Another may be a foot washing station. Another may be a place where one can go to corporately confess sins using a computer screen and receive encouragement by others who appreciate the authenticity. In fact, after one particular message on the person and work of Christ, various prints of Rembrandt’s depictions of Christ were stationed at various locations around the room. The pastor invited the participants to examine the works and relate them to his message. All of these stations are examples of creative interplay and expression of

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<sup>283</sup> *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, edited by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67.

worship.

Emerging churches that “minister as postmoderns” are the revisionists.<sup>284</sup> In order to separate from other emerging churches but still retain some association, many of them identify themselves as “emergent.” They are the most controversial as they apply such tools as deconstructionism to central evangelical doctrine and practices, speculating whether these endeared and central doctrines and cherished activities are truly appropriate in a postmodern context. Moreover, like those who integrated modernism with theology, evangelical scholars are integrating postmodernism with theology. Others are advocating a nonfoundational theology.<sup>285</sup> For example, Philip Kennison claims that a commitment to both objective truth and the correspondence theory is merely “...an epistemic project [that] is funded by ‘Cartesian anxiety,’ a product of methodological doubt...”<sup>286</sup>

Traditional evangelical churches are criticized for integrating Enlightenment reason such as formulating systematic theological doctrines from a disinterested, objective point of view that is scientific in nature. The attitude that comes with such formulations tend to be certain or dogmatic, and triumphalistic.<sup>287</sup> Thus, “theological non-negotiables” such as the doctrine of inerrancy, the gospel, and substitutionary atonement are now being

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<sup>284</sup> Helpful introduction to postmodernism is Joseph Natoli’s, *A Primer to Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>285</sup> For example, see “How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals Be NonFoundationalists?” in *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* by Rodney Clapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2000); Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*; Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

<sup>286</sup> Phillip Kennison, ‘There’s No Such Thing as Objective truth, and It’s a Good Thing, Too,’ in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (ed. Timothy Philips and Dennis Okholm; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 157.

<sup>287</sup> Jim Belcher, *The Deep Church*, 79. For example, In “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” Scot McKnight cites a comment made by theologian LeRon Shults:

From a theological perspective, this fixation with propositions [propositional truth] can easily lead to the attempt to use the finite tools of language on an absolute Presence that transcends and embraces all finite reality. Languages are culturally constructed symbol systems that enable humans to communicate by designating one finite reality in distinction from one another. The truly infinite God of Christian faith is beyond all our linguistic grasping, as all the great theologians from Irenaeus to Calvin have insisted, and so the struggle to capture God in our finite propositional structures is nothing short of linguistic idolatry [37].

deconstructed.<sup>288</sup> Why? They argue that our theological assumptions and practices are embedded if not determined by a particular historical context.<sup>289</sup>

For example, emergent leaders like Doug Pagitt, contend that theology is an expression of one's relationship with God, integrating both a person's story with God's story.<sup>290</sup> Theology is part and parcel of our lives, not an organized system of thought detached from living life. Theology is always contextual because theology is always human.<sup>291</sup> "It is people who create theology as a tool of our culture to explain reality as we see it."<sup>292</sup> Theology is also particular because we live in particular situations. Thus, the gospel must meet those particular situations.<sup>293</sup>

In fact, in a response to Mark Driscoll's emphasis on the gospel message, Pagitt states:

I think much of our difference comes from the fact that in many ways we are telling different stories of Christianity. We seem to be calling for different starting and ending points. This could be reason to just turn from one another and part ways, but I am not choosing that path. I feel that we need to engage with one another, even though the difficulty that accompanies such an effort.<sup>294</sup>

As a result of this view, emergent people are re-evaluating not only what is non-essential to Christian orthodoxy (e.g., Rapture of the Church), but central doctrines. For example, in his on-line article posted on the *Emergent Village* website, "A Time To Reconstruct," Jonathan Brink contends that the traditional way of seeing the Gospel story just didn't work for him anymore. Therefore, deconstructionism is necessary in order that

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>289</sup> In 2004 the Evangelical Theology Society's annual conference was, "What Is Truth?" four plenary sessions were devoted to the relationship between truth, church, and postmodernism from biblical, theological, and philosophical perspectives in view of the postmodern impact on evangelicalism. See Andreas K. Köstenberger, "'What is Truth?' Pilate's Question in Its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context," *JETS* 48/1 (March 2005): 33-62; R. Albert Mohler, "What is Truth? Truth and Contemporary Culture," *JETS* 48/1 (March 2005): 63-75; J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *JETS* 48/1 (March 2005): 77-88; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48/1 (March 2005) 89-114.

<sup>290</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*, 121-3.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 123-4.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 42.

new insights may be discovered. Moreover, conflicting historical views of the atonement (e.g., Ransom Theory; Penal Substitution) could no longer be ignored. While wrestling with these theories is important, Brink came to the point whereby he stopped believing in the story people told him, while retaining his belief in Jesus Christ. In sum, he had reached a point as a Western evangelical that he could no longer accept the theological views that were handed down to him. Thus, as a result of a three-year period, he discovered that the gospel message could be framed as “ferocious love,” an act of divine mercy. Brink writes:

Seeing this new possibility changed everything. It informed both my sense of pain and suffering, justice, and reconciliation. It gave me new meaning to God’s invitation to love my neighbor as myself. Salvation was no longer release from something out there, but from something within. Redemption was about me trading in my false judgment for God’s.<sup>295</sup>

This posting is part of the Emergent Village, which is described as a “council of practitioners” who promote a network of organizers and participants engaged in revisionist-type dialogue and ministry. Conceived by Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt on June 21, 2001, this organization has become a distinguishable branch of the emerging movement described as “emergent.”

In Brian D. McLaren’s groundbreaking book, *A New Kind of Christian*, the author shares his own personal story as a pastor about having a “crisis of faith.”<sup>296</sup> He writes, “Sometime in 1994, at the age of thirty-eight, I got sick of being a pastor. Frankly, I was almost sick of being a Christian.”<sup>297</sup> Though he only thought he had two alternatives, either continue practicing and promoting a type of Christianity about which he had deep

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<sup>295</sup> Jonathan Brink, “A Time To Deconstruct,” Emergent Village Webblog (July 18, 2010) at [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com). Retrieval Date: July 20, 2010. <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/brink-reconstruct>.

<sup>296</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on A Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

reservations or leave the Christian ministry altogether, he came to a realization that there was a third alternative open to him, namely, “learn to be a Christian in a new way.”<sup>298</sup>

In this personal story he refers to Alan Roxbource, a fellow colleague of the Terranova Project, which is “an initiative to explore how Christian faith will reconfigure in the postmodern matrix.”<sup>299</sup> Roxbource instructs people how to deconstruct and reconstruct their lives, which McLaren describes as a process of paradigm change. This process, which he personally experienced as he gave up the former way of doing church to a new way that integrates philosophical postmodernism, normally involves five stages:

(a) The first stage is “stability.” At this phase one holds to a paradigm or system of thought by which one perceives the world. Everything is adequately explained. But over time this way of seeing eventually gives way to feelings of entrapment or imprisonment.

(b) Stage two is “discontinuity.” Here a high level of aggravation and dissatisfaction surfaces. The current paradigm is no longer as adequate. At this level one reacts and “can’t stop talking about how wrong, inhumane, or insupportable it is.”<sup>300</sup> One can be affected psychologically and physically.

(c) Stage three is “disembedding.” Face with the knowledge that the current theories or systems are unsupportable, one begins the process of disconnecting from those beliefs. McLaren states, “In area 3, people gradually turn from deconstructing the past to constructing the future and begin the hard work of designing a new paradigm to take the

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., xiv. In, “McLaren Emerging,” McKnight summarized McLaren’s struggle with and recovery of Christianity this way:

To use the words of fellow emergent thinker Peter Rollins, the Northern Irish philosopher at Ikon Community, McLaren experienced the ‘fidelity of betrayal.’ He had to betray the Jesus and the gospel and the church that nurtured him to become faithful to the Jesus of this kingdom vision [61].

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

place of the old.”<sup>301</sup> This stage is filled with “creative exhilaration, challenge, and anxiety” in view of the lack of assurance that new paradigm will be superior to the old one and because it invites conflict with the defenders of the old paradigm.

(d) “Transition” is stage four. At this level one is still working through habituated patterns from the former theories or system. As a result, one has not “fully entered the new world.”<sup>302</sup> Even though adjustment is in play, new freedoms and possibilities arise.

(e) Stage five is “reformation.” At this level one decides to experience this new world. Being invigorated with a hope and passion, he steps out into this new way of seeing.<sup>303</sup> McLaren adds, “Of course, one must anticipate a time when the new liberating paradigm itself becomes confining and old.”<sup>304</sup>

In sum, emergent churches redefine “orthodoxy” as a way of being in the world rather than a set of fixed beliefs about the world; for theological doctrines and descriptive terms fail in sufficiently expressing totalizing truths, and theology itself is language-bound and shaped. Not only does the movement speak about the end of meta-narratives and express disapproval of those who make absolute truth claims, but the adherents then recast theology as an on-going conversation about God.<sup>305</sup> As a result, the emergent leaders are

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> For example, Scot McKnight observes:

...ironic faith grows out of emergents’ realization that language plays a large role in our faith and our claims to know the truth. Even a first-year college course in literature or criticism exposes students to philosophers Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, or Stanley Fish, and few students are left unchanged and unchallenged. Emergents reason that theology is language-bound; language has its limits; the Bible is in language; that means the Bible, too, has the limits of language. The Christian faith, many emergents conclude, is language-shaped and that means it is culturally shaped. Why does one language-either ancient Middle Eastern or modern Western-get to tell the whole story? Emergents by and large plead for a multilingual approach to theology, which can lead to an ironic relationship to the language of the Bible and Western theology [Scot McKnight, “The Ironic Faith of Emergents,” *Christianity Today* (September 2008): 63].

calling for Christianity to “deconstruct itself” and “reconstruct itself” in order to reach a postmodern culture.<sup>306</sup>

6. *An additional type of emerging church.* While the emergent movement is one aspect of the larger emerging movement, another emerging expression has recently appeared in reaction to the emergent stream. Once again, under the ministry of people like Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church, there is a growing movement of emerging churches are combining Reformed theology with the “relevants” in a very dynamic way. Known as the Acts 29 Network, like-minded Reformed emerging churches are dynamically growing, even among conservative students of Scripture. The Acts 29 Network is an association that not only offers a way to interact with fellow churches, but promotes aggressive church planting.

Adherents’ emphasis on Reformation theology stresses the heart cries of a past era to a future generation. Driscoll’s church, for example, emphasizes Augustinian-Reformation themes including the sovereignty of God, depravity of man, *Sola Scriptura*, and the wonder of Calvary. Utilizing technology such as podcasts, plain-talking, and contemporary music, as well as promoting incarnational living, Mark Driscoll’s influence alone cannot be ignored in contemporary evangelicalism. While agreeing with the emerging leaders that traditional churches have compromised in their integration of Enlightenment and are

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<sup>306</sup> Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity: Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 9. Jethani recommends that Christians commend themselves to the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. For example, he states we need to deconstruct our commodified view of God and reconstruct a sense of wonder through silence; deconstruct our branded identities and reconstruct identities rooted in faith through love; deconstruct our attempts at transformation through external events, and reconstruct internal transformation through prayer; deconstruct our devotion to institutions as God’s vessels, and reconstruct relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ; deconstruct our unceasing pursuit of pleasure, and reconstruct the redemptive power of suffering through fasting; deconstruct our contentment with segregation, and reconstruct the unity of all people through the cross; deconstruct the individualism pushed by consumerism, and reconstruct our love for strangers through hospitality [Ibid., 170].

insensitive to the postmodern culture, he contends that the emergent leaders are promoting heresy.<sup>307</sup>

7. *Six themes that encapsulate the emerging church movement(s)*. While these four types of emerging streams are able to summarize the various types of emerging churches, Scot McNight offers six themes that help us to collectively describe this diverse movement. Once again, each of these themes flows on a continuum, differing from one church to the next.<sup>308</sup>

First, emerging churches are provocative in rhetoric. Emerging leaders are not afraid to seriously question and address long-held beliefs and practices in a worship experience. For example, in one emerging church the pastor shares his personal fears and frustrations with non-negotiable doctrine such as inspiration of Scripture in an effort to promote sincere dialogue with those who are experiencing the same issues. “If there are so many views about the inspiration of Scripture, then how can we really know our view is really right?”

Second, while emerging churches react differently to philosophical postmodernism, all agree that postmodernism has opened opportunities of dialogue with various communities of the Christian faith, whether Catholic or Protestant and are interacting with non-Christian

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<sup>307</sup> For example, Mark Driscoll writes:

What is at stake is nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ and people’s eternal destinies. If in our day culture rises up in authority over Scripture in the church, any god rises up other than the Trinity, and any gospel is preached other than the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins, then we literally have hell to pay for emerging into false teachers with false doctrines, false gods, and false gospels that assure false hope [*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 35].

<sup>308</sup> Scot McKnight’s insight is helpful:

The *emerging* movement, the larger movement of which *emergent* is a segment, remains more or less connected to the core of evangelicalism. It contains a variety of missional impulses; it remains concerned about the church; and its theological ideas will undoubtedly continue to impact evangelicalism. John Stott recently sketched three core practices of emerging churches: the way of Jesus, breaking down the sacred-secular divide, and community living. He says that, ‘emerging churches are rediscovering [these core practices] and giving them a fresh emphasis’ Rediscovering accurately describes what is doing on, but those in the emerging movement feel these core practices are a fresh discovery [“McLaren Emerging,” 59].

religions. Moreover, having rejected Enlightenment assumptions and using deconstructionism to critique their own ideas and practices, many are drawing from Christianity's heritage of thought and practice, reconstructing religious expressions or activities of worship in creative, pluralistic, experiential, and sensory ways.

Third, and perhaps the most important theme to emerging churches is the focus on living out the Christian faith. For instance, the focus on praxis is evident in how they restructure the worship service. The use of art, candles, incense, and sacred space are just a few examples. They may form a circle and pray in silence, study a Christian icon, meet social needs, or read Patristic prayers to one another. Moreover, they desire to practice "the way of Jesus" in order to meet needs in culture, for right thinking does not necessarily equate right living.<sup>309</sup>

Fourth, emerging churches contend their focus is to be missional, or actively participating in the community where God's redemptive work takes place. McKnight writes:

This holistic emphasis finds perfect expression in the ministry of Jesus, who went about doing good to bodies, spirits, families, and societies. He picked the marginalized up from the floor and put them back in their seats at the table; he attracted harlots and tax collectors; he made the lame walk and opened the ears of the dead. He cared, in other words, not just about lost souls, but also about whole persons and whole societies.<sup>310</sup>

Therefore, emerging church see themselves as avenues through which God works, demonstrating authentic living not merely in words, but works. For example, some own coffee houses and art galleries while others are constructing and participating, that is, literally living with those who are described by society as "homeless."

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<sup>309</sup> Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church" *Christianity Today* (February 2007): 34-9.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

Fifth, because emerging churches are protesting against such things as the integration and reductionistic spirit of modernism in evangelical thought and practice, they often describe themselves as “post-evangelical.” For example, systematic theologies that tend to be finalizing, formulistic, totalizing, and transcendental, are held with suspicion because they are scripted by the author’s particular context, and because no language exists that is truly able to capture the person, nature, and activities of God. Thus, the Christian epistemology of emerging leaders is chastened by such ideas as contextualization, human finiteness, and the noetic effects of sin.

And sixth, since these churches emphasize an incarnational mindset, they are especially sensitive to the plight of the those who are alienated, oppressed, unfortunate, and victimized, and they tend to be proactively involved in what may be described as the social gospel.<sup>311</sup> They are not committing themselves to addressing acts of injustice and the difficulties of those who are impoverished on the basis of promoting a postmillennial kingdom. Rather, they desire to truly reflect Christ to their neighbors.

8. *Description of aesthetic activities.* Given the diversity and fluid-like nature of emerging churches, it is impossible to evaluate the aesthetics of a given emerging church. However, underlying the specific activities, which may vary from week to week, and church to church, six themes stand out. While they often overlap one another, they provide valuable insight in examining the aesthetic practices of emerging churches.

First, aesthetic activities are contextualized. While they may draw upon various expressions of worship used elsewhere, emerging churches strive to promote aesthetic

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<sup>311</sup> For example, Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America: An Evangelical’s Lament* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); David Kuo, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

activities that reflect their own particular situational and historical context. For example, one emerging church is found in the Bohemian district of a metropolitan city; its church design is a functional coffee house. The coffee house becomes the center of worship on Sundays.

Second, the emerging churches embrace a “living aesthetic,” that is, activities or expressions of worship are connected to a particular community’s contextual situation. Instead of fixed observances of actions or procedures, aesthetic activities of worship are organic. For example, one pastor explained to me that the worship activities change depending upon the particular needs or climate of their community. “One week we may dance in celebration to the great things God has done and another week we may express our worship together in total silence.”

Aesthetic activities are also tied to the actual ambiance of the community. In other words, the particular context and tone of the culture in which the church is embedded informs the manner and frame of mind in which the church will pursue its activities of worship. For example, if the greater community is distressed about a particular issue, the church designed to minister to that particular community is so “fluid-like” in its form that it is willing to take on a particular project as an expression of worship. If social injustice takes place, then the church may offer a candlelight vigil, focusing on how the Bible, practical experience, and Christian tradition inform the people of social injustice.

Third, emerging churches promote tension. Rather than merely focusing on knowledge (e.g., traditional churches) or skills (e.g., seeker-sensitive), they call people to free themselves from a blinded conformity of socially accepted beliefs or customs of behavior resulting from traditional conceptions of worship. Therefore, they attempt to create a worship experience that is secure or safe and challenging enough in order to deal people’s

underlying fears, prejudices, or problems. By challenging one's assumptions or fixed ways of doing something, using a conversational format, an attempt is made to move the person to consider truth in a different way. They are after qualitative growth in the lives of those who attend. For example, if one is struggling with a particular addiction, then the church might have one who is recovered come to the church and share his or her story.

Fourth, aesthetic activities involve active engagement of the whole person. For example, one emerging pastor in Louisiana explained to me that by having various stations in a given worship service, he is able to touch on all the physical senses (touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing), promoting inviting, challenging, and memorable experiences. In other words, various learning styles are taken into account to stress a particular theme, striving to impact the human mind, heart, and will.

For example, a service begins with music and prayer. Using Scripture, the pastor presents a frank discussion about temptation and sin in his own life. Afterwards, he invites the participants to silently and collectively walk through seven stations. The first station is a collection of statements from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, all creatively organized on the wall. The second station is a large reprint of Rembrandt's *Blinding of Sanson* from Judges 16:20-21. The significance is that no one is immune to sin. The third station is bitter herbs used in a Jewish Passover service. The fourth station involves a person offering testimony about his own destructive addiction, and how he found recovery, peace, and hope in God and accountability. The fifth station is an invitation to deal with one's sins by writing them down on a piece of paper. The sixth station involves nailing those papers to a large wooden cross, reflecting forgiveness. The seventh station is the celebration of the communion. The service ends with singing and dancing as they celebrate God's forgiveness. They leave with a sheet of

paper with Wilde and Lewis quotes and Scripture passages about the consequences of sin and the promises of God's grace.

Fifth, emerging church offers "pluralistic" expressions of activities. Rather than exclusively revolving its worship around the exposition of Scripture, there are multiple ways one may participate in a given worship services given one's particular disposition, interest, or mood. For example, in one emerging church, there is an assortment of activities one may pursue at a given Sunday occasion during corporate worship. One may choose to spend a Sunday morning studying the Scripture, silently meditating upon God in silence lit by candles by incense, or paint in response to what the pastor said. These activities may change from week to week. In fact, the entire design of the interior of the church may change from Sunday to Sunday. Furthermore, emerging churches will draw from various historical and cultural activities to enhance the worship experience. For example, a shofar, an ocarina, a harpsichord, a banjo, and an electric guitar may all be used. In one service, Latin jazz may be incorporated whereas in another service, the emphasis may be on the Eucharist. Emerging churches are not only acknowledging that various forms of worship are generated from particular communities, but also they are welcoming opportunities to interact and grow from multicultural expressions, practices, and rituals.

Sixth, aesthetics is experientially pluralistic. Because of its emphases on contextualization and experimentation, the emerging church inquires, invites, and pursues different ways to enhance the worship experience. Its justification is to enrich each other's lives intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, as well as engage in expressions that continue to break biases. Thus, the interplay of history, foreign culture, and novelty will

free people to worship God in new ways, spurring creativity, memorable meetings, and cultural connections that otherwise might be missed or neglected.<sup>312</sup>

### C. CONCLUSION

We have examined two recent attempts to bridge the culture gap and offer meaningful religious activities, practices, and rituals: the seeker-sensitive movement and the emerging church movement(s). Both movements recognize problems and failures of the activities of traditional churches and believe that culture has changed to the extent that their practices are ineffective in bridging the culture gap. The seeker-sensitive church seeks to revolutionize the way the church is done, in part, by changing the church's presentation before the community. By mirroring community and targeting felt-needs, striving to be experimental, innovative, and self-examining, the leadership and members hope to bridge the culture gap and provide a memorable worship experience. On the other hand, while the emerging churches vary in approaches to bridging the culture gap, they all embrace particular or situational contextualization and seek to practice incarnational living to a post-Christian society. Their practices are pluralistic, sensory, and experiential. Now we shall utilize our Deweyan tool to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these two movements.

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<sup>312</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*, 128-9.

## CHAPTER V

### DEWEYAN ANALYSIS OF THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE CHURCH AND THE EMERGING CHURCH

Using Dewey's aesthetics we will now evaluate the seeker-sensitive movement and the emerging church movement(s) in view of their striking attempts to bridge the culture gap between local churches and community and promote meaningful experiences to all involved. We will first examine the seeker-sensitive movement addressing both strengths and problems. We will then turn our attention to the emerging church movement(s). With each examination I will draw attention to particular issues contributing to non-aesthetic experiences. Different details will be included with both examinations. However, the understanding these churches have gained on the ways to bridge the culture gap and offer fulfilling religious activities, practices, and rituals will be taken into account in each analysis. Afterwards, I will discuss why both recent movements fail to adequately address the culture gap. I will then offer four Deweyan insights to better equip local churches to be relevant to each and every generation.

#### A. STRENGTHS OF THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE MOVEMENT

The seeker-sensitive movement is to be extolled for embracing experimentation, offering opportunities where aesthetic experience can occur, and exercising artistic engagement in religious activities in order to bridge the culture gap and offer a memorable worship experience. Let us take a closer look at these commendable qualities.

1. *The value of experimentation.* The seeker-sensitive church is willing to experiment in order to know how to best engage culture. Unlike the elite, broken, and humdrum, the seeker-sensitive church purposefully continually experiments, striving to adapt to the

cultural context in relevant ways. Experimentation is a value and a tool embraced by the seeker-sensitive church. Seeker-sensitive churches will experiment even if it means reengineering the church's visible structures and religious activities. An activity becomes stagnant or is not as effective as the leadership expects, the leadership is willing to investigate and modify. If the adjustments do not work, a seeker-sensitive church like Willow Creek will likely terminate the program and make inquiries elsewhere. Thus, it is the expectation of a seeker-sensitive church to experiment, adjust, assess, and even cut off any activity that achieves nothing or performs mechanically.

Experimentation is critically important given the neglect of such activities by the elite, broken, and humdrum churches which struggle with activities that fail to generate beneficial ends (e.g., bridge the culture gap). Though it is difficult to end some of these ministries for reasons such as tradition, habituated expectations, or hurting people's feelings, traditional churches fail to realize non-aesthetic experiences are forgettable and do not feed the soul. Being unwilling to change makes a church a slave to its traditions or other stifling factors and, even worse, prevents growth and can lead one to irritation if not existential dissatisfaction with not only local churches, but also the very idea of institutional religion.

Consider the testimony of Brian McLaren, a pastor who became terribly frustrated with the traditional church. His confession reveals how the mechanical routine led him to a vacuous disposition, hungering for something more, but also how the routine became the normative experience and fixed expectation of his audience. To introduce something different in church worship was not perceived as a potential opportunity. Rather, it was seen as a threat to traditional churchgoers. He writes:

I preach sermons that earn the approving nods of the lifelong churchgoers, because they repeat the expected vocabulary and formulations, words that generally convey little actual meaning after hearing them fifty-two times a year, year after year, but work like fingers, massaging the weary souls of earnest people. Meanwhile, as the initiated relax under this massage of familiar words, as they emit an almost audible ‘ahhh’ to hear their cherished vocabulary again, these very massaging messages leave the uninitiated furrowing their brows, shaking their heads, and shifting in their seats. They do this sometimes because they don’t understand but even more when they do understand—because the very formulations that sound so good and familiar to the ‘saved’ sound downright weird or even wicked to the ‘seekers’ and the skeptics. These people come to me and ask questions, and I give my best answers, my best defenses, and by the time they leave my office, I have convinced myself that their questions are better than my answers.<sup>313</sup>

Then he goes on to say:

I do the reverse: I preach sermons that turn the lights on for spiritual seekers but earn me critical letters and phone calls from the ‘veterans’ of the church often because the expected fingers didn’t reach through my message to massage them as expected.<sup>314</sup>

This above account by McLaren not only revealed the pastor’s hunger for aesthetic experiences, but also supports an important point Dewey makes in his discussion about having an experience. Dewey notes:

There exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience [non-aesthetic extremes of either randomness or routine] that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience. Thus, when the esthetic appears, it so sharply contrasts with the picture that has been formed of experience, that it is impossible to combine its special qualities with the features of the picture and the esthetic is given an outside place and status.<sup>315</sup>

Ironically, members who attend a local church that demands a non-aesthetic routine may relish new and exciting aesthetic experiences in their daily lives. Why should churches be excluded from such opportunities? This irony is reminiscent of Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* where beauty is found outside but not inside the church. This is in stark contrast to the Jewish accounts of God’s Shekinah glory inhabiting the tabernacle and later the temple. In

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<sup>313</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, xvii.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 41-2.

the midst of an organized and detailed religion that was governed by laws and precepts, aesthetic experiences were seen, felt, heard, and tasted among the people as they sacrificed, celebrated, grieved, and exalted their God together as a community. Experimentation is a refreshing quality to have in any church and the seeker-sensitive movement has proven its benefits.

2. *Value creativity and innovation.* The seeker-sensitive church is ever willing to inquire into new possibilities of communicating with its attendees and reaching out to the community. Unlike the elite and humdrum church, the seeker-sensitive church is willing to draw from its own resources in order to discover and ideas.

Unfortunately, criticisms abound about the seeker-sensitive church turning to “secular” resources to help a church become effective. But what these critics fail to understand is the church looks upon these resources (e.g., using business theories to structure church authority) as tools, that is, as instruments to generate better ends. Therefore using a tool that was created in spheres of life such as business and marketing, does not mean that the church is no longer “sacred.” Rather, intelligence is being displayed by assimilating amoral resources in order to better minister to people. No one can doubt the incredible response churches like Willow Creek have received from the utilization of varied tools and the moving results provided for both the church and community.

3. *Focus on community.* Opportunities such as fixing cars to give away to people in need or washing and styling the hair of a mother who is both homeless and battered, enrich all involved and provide opportunities to *properly* engage in experience as a participant and not a passive spectator.<sup>316</sup> When this occurs, the possibility for the emergence of an

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 54.

aesthetic experience is created. To be sure, the experience must move from inception, maturation, and ultimately to fulfillment. Of course, at each point the doing and undergoing must appropriately respond to each other, for the doing gives movement and variety and the undergoing, which is the corresponding element in the rhythm, supplies unity. This relationship between the doing and undergoing is remarkable, for the doing prevents monotony and useless repetitions whereas the undergoing saves the work from the “aimlessness of a mere succession of excitations.”<sup>317</sup> But what follows from this continuous developing integral experience is something enjoyable, exciting, and memorable: an inclusive and fulfilling close! The experience of fixing the car or styling hair can be an experience “lifted high above threshold of perception and is made manifest for its own sake.”<sup>318</sup>

Granted, opportunities to be involved will inevitably lead to problems for the local leadership such as handling stubborn personalities and opinions or sorting the ones who truly need help more than others. Nevertheless, opportunities are offered for people to actively participate and “take in” an experience. When we are able to take in a moment, we experience an “aliveness” that we do not receive when we are merely passive spectators in a church pew.<sup>319</sup> Thus, when a person is actively involved in a ministry project, not only will tension occur (since one is beginning with an indeterminate situation), but the possibility of closure or the completion of an experience, can also occur. As a result of the meaningful feeling of satisfaction from completion of serving others in an aesthetic experience, the participant may desire additional service-oriented experiences that lead to

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. 54-5.

moments of intense continuity. “The moment of passage from harmony is that of intensest life.”<sup>320</sup>

But we must not forget about the individual or persons receiving the gifts of the ministry (the car, the hairstyle, etc.). They too are part of that experience. Thus, there is the possibility for them to be enriched as well. An aesthetic experience will be meaningful to them and can also lead to important changes in their lives. People hunger for aesthetic experiences. “The time of consummation is also one of beginning anew.”<sup>321</sup>

4. *Value artistic engagement.* From the audio-visual technicians to the musicians, attentive care, engagement, and intense interest in doing well is typically exhibited. These are aesthetic qualities. Thus, the architecture in the auditorium, the choice of music and performance of, the use of cutting edge technology, and the messages given are thoughtfully planned, carefully designed, and creatively displayed to arrest the mind, provoke the heart, and stimulate the will to action. Talent, architecture, and technology are integral with human excellence. On-going critical reflection and adjustments are central to the activities as they continually improve week to week.<sup>322</sup>

## B. WEAKNESSES OF THE SEEKER-SENSITIVE MOVEMENT

In spite of all of these remarkable strengths, a number of significant problems need to be addressed in seeker-sensitive churches. To be sure, not every seeker-sensitive church is alike. But the following problems seem to be common: efficiency, focus, imbalance, exploitation, reductionism, amusement, and consumerism.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 4.

1. *Problem of efficiency.* While Dewey values experimentation, he would give a word of caution to the seeker-sensitive church about becoming too practical or mechanically efficient. Dewey states:

It is possible to be efficient in action and yet not have a conscious experience. The activity is too automatic to permit of a sense of what it is about and where it is going. It comes to an end but not to a close or consummation in consciousness. Obstacles are overcome by shrewd skill, but they do not feed experience.<sup>323</sup>

In contrast, between the poles of mechanical efficiency and aimlessness there “lie those courses of action in which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating toward an end that is felt as accomplishment as a process.”<sup>324</sup>

2. *Problem of focus.* While the seeker-sensitive church should be commended for imagining, planning, and preparing in order to achieve beneficial ends, the church should be warned in its “visioneering,” that is, projecting where the church should or will be in the future. The community in which the church is embedded is very precarious in nature. Moreover, because of the bilateral relationship between the church and community, the church itself changes and is affected by the culture. Allow space for the unpredictable.

But more importantly, if the church focuses too much on the future, people may lose where they are, who they are, and what they have in the present. In other words, we can become so preoccupied with the future that we neglect the opportunity to see our present experience. Dewey invites us to be “all there in the present,” that is, to “take in” the actual moment in which we find ourselves with all that we are. Dewey writes:

To the being fully alive the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo. It consists of possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here. In life, that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges. But all too often we exist in apprehensions of what the future may bring, and are divided within ourselves.

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

Even when not overanxious, we do not enjoy the present because we are subordinate it to that which is absent.<sup>325</sup>

This is also applicable if a church focuses too much on the past. Dewey notes, “our past is perceived as an oppressive burden rather than storehouses of resources by which to move confidently forward.”<sup>326</sup> But Dewey also claims, “Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive.”<sup>327</sup> I would personally add that our reflections upon the past moments of continuity and discontinuity *and* the precarious aspects of our future can be used to properly motivate us to seize the “now” with every aspect of our being.

3. *Problem of imbalance.* Strangely, in both cases of the elite church and the seeker-sensitive church, which offer two polarized ways of doing church, a struggle with passivity in corporate gatherings of worship surfaces. The seeker-sensitive church’s worship experience is aesthetically imbalanced in several ways. Though the didactic teaching has been replaced with entertainment, visual and auditory stimuli, colorful use of lights, and conversational-style speaking, the attendees are passive recipients of the experience. While aesthetic qualities exist in those moments when musical instruments are played with brilliance, when songs are performed with skill, and powerful images emerge on the giant screens, the audience is still only the spectator, not the participant. There is excessive doing from the worship team and excessive receiving experienced by the congregation. Likewise, there is deficient receiving from the few participants and deficient doing by the congregation. As a result, all miss opportunities to dynamically learn, reflect, and grow together. The results of this aesthetic imbalance include personal and collective

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

malnourishment.

Now it might be argued that the church is sensitive to issues related to aesthetic balance. If one were to stand back and look at the sum-total of the church's activities, it is clear that the church purposefully directs its attendees to extensive programs of ministry and outreach unlike the practices of the elite, broken, and humdrum churches and their small group ministries. To be sure, the seeker-sensitive church goes beyond the traditional churches we have examined, emphasizing active service to the community. This is a very commendable quality because the spectator becomes a participant in service to others. Notwithstanding, the concern is whether the audience is a participant or a spectator in the religious activity of corporate worship. If the audience is a spectator, then an imbalance results because the agent is passive in the worship experience. Therefore, in order to make the experience more enriching, passivity must go beyond recognition to engagement.

Dewey writes:

Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some *other* purpose, as we recognize a man on the street in order to greet or to avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there.<sup>328</sup>

4. *Problem of exploitation.* Similar to the sensational church, the worship experience can easily tilt to the excessive with its technology and assorted stimuli. The ever-present danger exists that a seeker-sensitive church may turn from using entertainment as a tool to enrich, to a means of exploiting the audience. One can be so saturated or overwhelmed with stimuli that critical thinking is ignored. Intoxication breeds impulsive and irrational decisions. If the church measures success by how many attend church, how many decisions

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 54.

are made to become a Christian, how many attend small groups, and how many baptisms take place, then I suspect the possibility becomes even more acute. Quality is exchanged for quantity.

Again, like the sensational church, the potential imbalance exists of imposing an experience upon a group rather than allowing an experience to organically and integrally develop within the activity of worship. How do we balance technology, stimuli, and entertainment whereby an aesthetic experience might occur without forcing an aesthetic simulation upon people? These instruments contribute to our experience when there is an organic “aliveness,” where everything fits together, and organic consummation occurs. But if the experience goes beyond its natural course of fulfillment, we have reason to believe these instruments are being used to enforce or continue something that goes beyond its natural limitations. Aesthetic consummation leads to release. While aesthetic experience may prove difficult to measure in a theater-like environment where these instruments abound and can simulate an experience, the question we must ask ourselves is that which Jonathan Edwards asked of the experiences he witnessed during the First Great Awakening, namely, have our lives authentically and qualitatively improved for the better from that worship service?

5. *Problem of reductionism.* The church also promotes historical and methodological reductionism. While advocating experimentation in order to improve lives, Dewey contends that we are never to ignore our past. Rather, Dewey calls us to take our past experiences, our lessons, and our heritage and engage the present.

But the live creature adopts its past; it can make friends with even its stupidities, using them as warnings that increase present wariness. Instead of trying to live upon

whatever may have been achieved in the past, it uses past successes to inform the present.<sup>329</sup>

We should look at our past, such as events, ideas, and implications as a “storehouse of resources by which to move confidently forward,” and then use the past, such as our stupidities as “warning signs” and our “past successes” to help us inquire, engage, and take in the present.<sup>330</sup>

In particular, by breaking away from their past in an effort to become relevant to culture, seeker-sensitive churches neglect their own theological, biblical, and philosophical heritage. This is unfortunate because it is in our past that we have a record of the consequences of ideas.<sup>331</sup> Moreover, the Christianity stands on the shoulders of many historical figures, and it is only to our detriment to ignore and move past their contributions to the faith. Like those who relegate art-products to museums, seeker-sensitive churches rob their attendees of the rich benefits church history offers to a context.

The exposition of Scripture, doctrinal teachings, and liturgy can be done in a manner that is not mechanical or routine. In fact, the exposition of Scripture can be a strength for a church as indicated in our analysis of the elite, broken, and humdrum church. This singular strength in the elite church continues to draw both the young and the old to its services. In those inductive teaching opportunities, interests can be aroused, creativity exercised, and attention fixed upon the riches of the past to inform us of our present condition.

Reductionism also finds expression in the area of religious art-products. If everything is directed to satisfying “me” in view of entertainment, where is the mystery to inquire, ponder, and reflect? For example, when one enters the Notre Dame Cathedral in France,

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Joseph Bottum, “Christians and Postmoderns,” *First Things* 201 (March 2010): 45.

the symbols and imagery can move the person to not merely look at the object, but to follow it along to an idea, historical event, person, or theme. The artwork serves as much more than an element to impress the eyes. An interest is stirred to investigate, to reach beyond impressions, and reflect. Art-products can engender those types of interactions. But in seeker-sensitive churches where the auditorium reflects a contemporary theater devoid of art-products, especially enduring art-products (e.g., certain images like the crucifix), reductionism is introduced because the focus is entirely on performance.

The sacred symbols, the stained glass, and the iconic arrangements can provoke one's interest, move one's affections, and add intellectual and historical depth to a religious activity, especially if it memorializes past events. In fact, if one explores the various world religions and their people-groups, imagery tends to naturally emerge, develop, and contribute to religious experience. In other words, imagery, whether religious or civic, seems to be part of our human experience and can be used to incite the best in us (e.g., our nation's flag).

Now one might argue that the music, entertainment, skits, and visual stimuli are the icons of today's worship experience. While that might be true, using these avenues of expression exclusively neglects other historical and material mediums that connect the past to the present (e.g., the cross). It is doubtful icons like the crucifix will ever be transient art-products. Certain ancient icons have historically stood the test of time and they have cross-culturally and generationally contributed to aesthetic experiences.

Interestingly, the removal of sacred symbols from the worship experience and the construction of buildings that are more reflective of a convention center than a church introduces aesthetic barrenness, not novelty in common life. Like the Parthenon or the Notre Dame Cathedral, certain architectural designs and art-products such as the Rose

Window stir our interests, generate community pride, and add “richness,” not “sterility” to an urban or suburban landscape. More importantly, this connection between the past to the present becomes critical for another important reason. In the words of John J. McDermott:

The human body is neither a container nor a box in a world of boxes. To the contrary, our bodies are present in the world as diaphanous [almost transparent] and permeable. The world, in its activities as the affairs of nature and the affairs of things, penetrates us by flooding our consciousness, our skin, and our liver with the press of the environment. We respond with our marvelous capacity to arrange, relate, reject, and, above all, symbolize these transactions.<sup>332</sup>

I do not want to neglect the idea that certain art-products may indeed be barriers to those who have been deeply hurt or alienated by a church. Yet the question must be asked, is viewing them as an obstacle, an obstacle in itself? The use of art-products links the past to the present and offers opportunities of aesthetic engagement that go beyond the sights and sounds of contemporary music, digital imagery, and inspirational words.

6. *Problem of amusement.* In his work, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman observes:

There is no doubt, in other words, that religion can be made entertaining. The question is, by doing so, do we destroy it as an ‘authentic object of culture’? And does the popularity of a religion that employs the full resources of vaudeville [popular entertainment] drive more traditional religious conceptions into manic and trivial displays?<sup>333</sup>

His basis for these two questions not only follows his analysis of the relationship between religion and entertainment, but is also built around an observation made by Hannah Arendt. She writes:

This state of affairs, which indeed is equalled nowhere else in the world, can properly be called mass culture; its promoters are neither the masses nor their entertainers, but are those who try to entertain the masses with what once was an authentic object of

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<sup>332</sup> John J. McDermott, “Glass without Feet: Dimensions of Urban Aesthetics,” in *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*, 205.

<sup>333</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition (New York: Penguin Press, 1985, 2005), 124.

culture, or to persuade them that *Hamlet* can be as entertaining as *My Fair Lady*, and educational as well. The danger of mass education is precisely that it may become very entertaining indeed; there are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect, but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say.<sup>334</sup>

Thus, the danger is not in the Christian faith becoming the content of entertainment, but entertainment becoming the content of seeker-sensitive churches. Is non-religious architecture a potential foreshadowing of non-religious activities? In *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Postman writes:

Here, I am merely making the point that religious tradition serves as a mechanism for the regulation and valuation of information. When religion loses much or all its binding power—if it is reduced to mere rhetorical ash—then confusion inevitably follows about what to attend to and how to assign it significance.<sup>335</sup>

Similarly, I suggest we ask ourselves whether excessive entertainment introduces genuine perspective, inflames our intelligence and creativity into action, and generates practical benefits for all involved.<sup>336</sup> If entertainment replaces the content of any church, will the church serve as an instrument that directs us toward something beyond our consumer needs? Will communities be qualitatively enriched? Will “enduring art-products” be created from such an environment?<sup>337</sup> Is there a “better adjustment in life and its conditions”?<sup>338</sup> Since excessive entertainment is non-aesthetic, I suspect Dewey would contend if this warning is ignored and entertainment becomes the content of religious activity, the church will not make the world a better place, no matter how well intentioned it may be.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 123-4.

<sup>335</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 80.

<sup>336</sup> “From A Common Faith,” *James & Dewey on Belief and Experience*, eds. John M. Capps and Donald Capps (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 237.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 220.

7. *Problem of consumerism.* While I sincerely applaud targeting the community in order to meet genuine needs and involving marketing experts to assist in that effort, there is the real possibility that people have been or will be reduced to “consumers” and not treated as persons.<sup>340</sup> Combined with excessive entertainment, the following concerns can easily become real problems.

First, Willow Creek emphasizes a dependence model of the church. Its ministry model is, “Figure out what you think everyone needs and then provide it through a program or an activity.”<sup>341</sup> By focusing on people as consumers, the church as an institution reconfirms its audience that life is self-oriented. As a result, individualism is affirmed over and against other aspects of life such as community.

But we are more than just individuals. We are participants in community. When we are preoccupied with ourselves, we become insensitive to our citizenship in community. For example, I have seen people neglect the opportunity to foster meaningful relationships in community even though they participate in community-centered programs because they perceive everything revolving around themselves. Will we be able to think beyond ourselves and inquire beyond the satisfaction of our desires, inclinations, and preferences

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<sup>340</sup> Consider Walt Kallestad’s *Entertainment Evangelism: Taking the Church Public* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 8-9. This author observes:

Perhaps the most important effect of the United State’s production, consumption, and exportation of entertainment products are the distinctions between entertainment, information, communications, and education is becoming less clear. Right now the average American spends forty hours and thirty dollars a week on entertainment. Entertainment is the most used medium in the world [Ibid., 8].

He then goes on to say:

If entertainment is such a force in our world, why don’t we utilize this human and cultural vehicle and redeem it for the proclamation of the gospel? Why should we allow our churches to become empty and sterile? Empty cathedrals and sterile church life do little to glorify God. When I see the kind of entertainment that America is exporting all over the world, I find it much of it disturbing. I can envision something different. Why could we not become the center for exporting positive images and values around the world? Do we need to allow destructive entertainment to dominate the culture? Why should not the church develop a style of engaging worship, music, and entertainment that can compete with anything on the market in terms of quality, yet springs from far different values and theological commitments? [Ibid., 8-9].

<sup>341</sup> Hawkins, Greg, Cally Parkinson, & Eric Arnson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 65.

to address and enrich the lives of others in a manner that is endearing, heroic, and perhaps even altruistic?

Targeting people as consumers also undervalues the benefits of tension. Like the humdrum church, seeker-sensitive churches fail to appreciate the benefits of tension found in experience. Consumerism values the acquisition of goods. Thus, by satisfying those tensions *for* people, not only are they placating the opportunity for them to experience self-discovery, but also creativity, ingenuity, and progress. As a result, dependence upon the church and unrealistic expectations begin to develop. In contrast, it is the conversion of resistance and tensions that help move us toward an aesthetic experience. Dewey states, “That which distinguishes an experience as esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close.”<sup>342</sup>

If we combine consumer approach with entertainment, then we face the legitimate concern that the novelty of church in common life will become irrelevant. Why go to church when one can be entertained elsewhere in community? What nutritious activities, events, and practices are offered if entertainment is the driving force of the worship service?

Using marketing tactics to target consumer needs in people can also lead to exploitation and constraint of both freedom and intelligence if diligent care is not applied. Not only can the value of people be reduced to a “number,” especially considering the church’s focus on quantitative growth, but the combination of consumerism and marketing strategies based on psychological and sociological habituations and responses can be used

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<sup>342</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 58.

to manipulate people. For example, Dewey writes:

We seem to be approaching a state of government by hired promoters of opinion called publicity agents. But the more serious enemy is deeply concealed in hidden entrenchments. Emotional habituations and intellectual habitudes on the part of men create the conditions of which the exploiters of sentiment and opinion only take advantage.<sup>343</sup>

But the problem of entertainment and consumerism goes beyond exploitation, for it can also result in decadence. When members are in a passive posture of receiving, dependency upon the church become normal, the self-motivation to actively face our discontinuity with the environment and intelligently, creatively, and resourcefully work through the problems ourselves is stifled. Unfortunately, when our consumer needs are met for us, opportunities for the experience of personal discovery and enrichment that results from working through problems, overcoming obstacles, and exchanging ideas are displaced.<sup>344</sup> Dewey put it this way, "...freedom in its practical and moral sense (whatever is to be said about it in some metaphysical sense) is connected with the possibility of growth, learning, and modification of character, just as is responsibility."<sup>345</sup> When we lose our freedom, we lose the possibility to grow.

Church decadence also takes its toll on pastors and their families. In his *New York Times* editorial, "Congregations Gone Wild," G. Jeffrey MacDonald contends that American pastors are suffering from burnout because of congregational pressure to "soothe and entertain them."<sup>346</sup> MacDonald writes:

In the early 2000s, the advisory committee of my small congregation in Massachusetts told me to keep my sermons to 10 minutes, tell funny stories and leave people feeling

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<sup>343</sup> Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics*, 222 cf. LW 2:341.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. Colin Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987) and Don Slater's *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997) offer helpful analyses of the origins and nature, and impact of consumerism.

<sup>345</sup> John Dewey, *Theory of the Moral Life* (New York: Holt, Reinhard and Winston, 1908, 1932, 1960), 171.

<sup>346</sup> G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Congregations Gone Wild," *The New York Times* (August 8, 2010): WK9.

great about themselves. The unspoken message in such instructions is clear: give us the comforting, amusing fare we want or we'll get our spiritual leadership from someone else.<sup>347</sup>

He concludes his argument by stating, “As religion becomes a consumer experience, the clergy become more unhappy and unhealthy.”<sup>348</sup> I could not agree more.

Therefore, everyone involved must continually ask whether targeting consumer-oriented goals enrich and improve lives, contributing to values such as freedom and health? While seeker-sensitive churches are “others-directed” in terms of small groups and community-driven programs, the idea is not just to serve others and experience a sense of belonging and purpose, but hopefully meet practical needs in a way that inspires greatness as individuals and as active participants in community.

We have analyzed the aesthetics of the seeker-sensitive church from a Deweyan perspective and uncovered four areas of strengths and seven problems. But because of Willow Creek’s emphasis on constant experimentation, review, and research, interesting discoveries were made that led to a shift in this megachurch’s paradigm.

In 2007 Willow Creek made a public announcement, shocking both seeker-sensitive churches and traditional churches alike. After hiring one of the nation’s foremost marketing experts, Greg Hawkins, to survey church members in 1991, the leadership

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> McDonald goes on to say:

Congregations that make such demands seem not to realize that most clergy don’t sign up to be soothsayers or entertainers. Pastors believe they’re called to shape lives for the better, and that involves helping people learn to do what’s right in life, even when what’s right is also difficult. When they’re being true to their calling, pastors urge Christians to do the hard work of reconciliation with one another before receiving communion. They lead people to share in the suffering of others, including people they would rather ignore, by experiencing tough circumstances — say, in a shelter, a prison or a nursing home — and seeking relief together with those in need. At their courageous best, clergy lead where people aren’t asking to go, because that’s how the range of issues that concern them expands, and how a holy community gets formed. Ministry is a profession in which the greatest rewards include meaningfulness and integrity. When those fade under pressure from churchgoers who don’t want to be challenged or edified, pastors become candidates for stress and depression [Ibid].

discovered disturbing information in the scientific research of church members. Hybels writes, “Among the findings: nearly one out of every four people at Willow Creek were stalled in their spiritual growth or dissatisfied with the church-and many of them were considering leaving.”<sup>349</sup> He goes on to say, “When I first heard these results, the pain of knowing was almost unbearable. Upon reflection, I realized that the pain of not knowing could be catastrophic.”<sup>350</sup>

Since experimentation is one of the church’s core values, a new strategic plan was revealed to the to the congregation in April 2007. The leadership stated:

We are convinced of one thing as we move forward: we don’t know if our plans will work, but we are committed to learning as we go. We might head in a wrong direction, but we would rather make a move than stand still, because we believe God is challenging us to act on what we’ve learned so far.<sup>351</sup>

Therefore, Bill Hybels told his congregation that Willow Creek’s message, “We know what you need and we can meet those needs for you” is wrong.<sup>352</sup> The leadership discovered that this message created unhealthy dependence and inappropriate levels of expectations. Hybels states, “We have been wrong. We need to rethink the coaching we give you as you pursue your spiritual growth.”<sup>353</sup> The leadership made the decision that they “want to move people from dependence on the church to a growing interdependent partnership with the church.”<sup>354</sup> In other words, the congregation needs to learn how to “feed themselves.” Hybels declared that the church must also transition from being a “spiritual parent to a spiritual coach.”<sup>355</sup> As a result, the church has rejected the idea of one

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<sup>349</sup> Hawkins, Parkinson, & Arnsion, *Reveal: Where Are You?*, 4.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*

program or plan that fits all, and it is creating assessment tools and customized directions to meet individual needs.<sup>356</sup>

Lastly, the church realized the excessive receiving of those who attended its religious services. Therefore, the leaders want to extend the impact of the weekly services. Though they are still brainstorming, one idea attempted was during “a five-week series on the book of James, we distributed a free journal that was designed to help people take next steps wherever they were along the spiritual continuum.”<sup>357</sup> The journal had pages for note-taking, week long study questions in view of the passage examined, study questions for those in small groups, and insights from a biblical commentary for those who want to dig deeper independently.

In sum, the church is now encouraging other seeker-sensitive churches in its association to (1) Ask more than “How many?” (2) Go beyond “How are you?”, and (3) Ask “How does that help someone grow?” Thus, with renewed excitement, Willow Creek’s team of leaders contends that this research forced them to ask questions, continue to try new things, and keep reassessing in order to help people grow.<sup>358</sup>

Before we move to our analysis of the emerging church, one additional comment is needed regarding a recent criticism of the seeker church. This will serve as a transitional point to our analysis of the emerging church and reveals a common problem among many of the churches in this study. Some scholars are claiming the seeker-sensitive church has already failed to adjust to culture. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger of Fuller Seminary believe these churches are unable to reach our culture.<sup>359</sup> Why? They contend we are

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 65-6.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>359</sup> Belcher, *The Deep Church*, 36-7.

turning into a “post-consumeristic culture,” that is, we are no longer embracing the belief that value is determined by economic factors. Values such as personal identity, purpose, and goals are separated from material objects people own, possess, pursue, or consume (vanity). Thus, for post-consumers, the seeker-sensitive approach of using marketing tactics to bridge the culture gap generates personal alienation, a lack of authenticity, and genuine interest in the well being of others. Ironically, the seeker-sensitive church feeds our narcissistic appetites. Additionally, they symbolize authoritarian institutions no matter how performance driven they may be. Church polity and proclamations from the pulpit still reside in the pastor or leadership staff.

I reject Gibbs and Bolger’s meta-narrative claim that our culture is transitioning to a post-consumeristic culture because we are embedded in culture and do not stand above it with a God-like viewpoint. But what we can say is there is a growing interest in ideas that find historical expression in Romanticism (e.g., the hostility toward reason and expansiveness of reality).<sup>360</sup> We have inherited history from previous experiences. As a result, people turn to past ideas, expressions, and events to better understand and deal with the present and prepare for future possibilities.

In his work, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor contends that, in response to modernism, authoritarianism, material success, and consumerism, a resurgence of Romanticism is finding contemporary expression.<sup>361</sup> Taylor observes young people who are seeking “a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the

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<sup>360</sup> W. T. Jones, *Kant and the Nineteenth Century: A History of Western Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1975), 101-08.

<sup>361</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 507. See also, Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel, & Bronislaw Szerszynski *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2008).

inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity.”<sup>362</sup> In *Spiritual Marketplace*, Wade Roof Clark asserts there is a growing amount of people who are “looking for a more direct experience of the sacred, for greater immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual depth.”<sup>363</sup> In fact, Wolf contends that three aspects of our present situation particularly stand out. “Large sectors” of the American population today are interested in “deepening their spirituality,” emphasizing “self-understanding and self-reflexivity” (e.g., quest, seeking, and searching, and have ‘spiritual yearnings’).<sup>364</sup> Those who are appealing to Romantic ideas emphasize themes such as holism, individuality, integrity, and unity. Words often used include balance, flow, harmony, integration, and being at one, that is, centered.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, they are in pursuit of what may be described as an “ethic of authenticity.” Taylor’s description of this ethic is helpful:

I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The mode of spiritual life is thus the quest...It is a quest which can’t start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience.<sup>366</sup>

As a result, these scholars are noting among many young people who exhibit a desire for “spirituality” but not “institutionalized religion.” Once again, reminiscent of Vincent Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* with his contrast of cosmos offering light whereas the church does not, many are turning away from “institutional religion” with all of its authority and

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Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507. In the National Study of Youth and Religion, funded by the Lily Endowment, Sociologist Christian Smith recently concluded from his comprehensive study among contemporary teenagers (ages 13-17), that their “religion” is moralistic, therapeutic, and deistic [*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009)]. In fact, he defines their religion as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” While institutional religion may be helpful teenagers do not believe it is necessary. Historic, orthodox Christianity has little bearing upon these findings.

<sup>363</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86. Interestingly, he contends that the Baby Boomers are emerging into five sub-cultures: dogmatists (religious but not spiritual), born-again Christians, mainstream believers, metaphysical believers and seekers (e.g., Zen Buddhists; Wiccans; New-Agers), and secularists (areligious).

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>365</sup> Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Zzerszynski, & Trusting, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004), 26.

<sup>366</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507-8.

rules, and are more inclined to consider subjective aspects of spirituality with an emphasis on self, wholeness, health, and feelings.

In sum, what we are able to say is there are people who are pointing to what we have inherited from history and are using that to inform their present experience. While no one can say from a bird's eye perspective that our culture is universally "post-modern" or "Romantic," or "narcissistic," the lesson for us is as our culture continually changes, old ideas, expressions, and events are inevitably considered and are used to inform people's present conditions, shed light upon previous experiences, and anticipate and prepare for new experiences. Therefore, exclusively using one approach to bridge the culture gap only aggravates the discontinuity between church and community. Instead, a church should appeal to a plethora of tools to achieve temporary continuity. Appealing to history is one of those tools.

### C. STRENGTHS OF THE EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT (S)

One recent attempt that certainly appeals to the past while not ignoring the present is the pluralistic emerging church movement. We will now direct our attention to analyzing this complex phenomenon. We will discover the emerging church is more aligned with Dewey's aesthetic insights than any other church we have examined. Yet, ironically, the emerging church struggles with some of the same issues that the elite, sensational, and seeker-sensitive churches face.

Emerging churches are to be commended for attention to contextualization, diversity, creative spontaneity, dialogical teaching, and the willingness to use historical resources as tools to enrich present experience. Moreover, emerging churches are sensitive that they are in culture, not above it. Let us now explore these strengths before we turn to the problems this church movement has or will inevitably face.

1. *Embrace contextualization.* In order to bridge the culture gap, emerging churches embrace contextualization. Presupposing that our contemporary society is pluralistic and post-Christian, they contend that the church needs to return to the ways in which it originally spread in first few centuries of Christianity's existence in order to bridge the culture gap. Thus, the subculture should be allowed to penetrate and inform how the church goes about its activities. Direct experience comes from the ongoing interaction of the community and the church together.<sup>367</sup>

Contextualization involves “exegeting the community” and examining how other successful churches in similar contexts are reaching out to their particular communities.<sup>368</sup> “Exegeting the community” means asking the community about its needs, preferences, and values, and discovering what the local objections are regarding church, life, and other relevant issues.<sup>369</sup> The emerging church realizes its own existence and mission are bound to the community in the most intimate way. This is seen in such ways as how the church is designed and how activities, practices, and rituals of worship are conducted.

The benefit of contextualization resonates with Dewey's understanding of our relationship to our environment. Emerging churches claim the traditional and seeker ways of doing church are already irrelevant. Churches, like organisms, continually fall out of step with the “march of surrounding things.” Thus emerging churches realize they must reach out to the culture by means of contextualization. So the music, the food, and the way a pastor teaches will conform to the subculture. One emerging church, for example, actually meets in a gay bar every Sunday morning right in the center of the gay district in a

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<sup>367</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 15.

<sup>368</sup> Ed Stetzer & David Putnman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in the Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 21.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

metropolitan city. That does not mean this emerging church is advocating the practice of homosexuality. In fact, this particular church, since it is a member of the Acts 29 Network, embraces Reformation theology. But it does mean a church can contextualize even in the most unlikely places and in the most malleable ways. Thus, for them, church and culture overlap and merge in various ways. They are always becoming, never fixed in their attitude toward culture and themselves, recognizing the pluralistic differences and changes that occur in culture and even within themselves.

Emerging churches' sensitivity to contextualization illuminates the importance of diversity. There is no single prescriptive way in which worship and other activities are to be done. As evidenced in the practices of the early church (pre-Constantine), each church contextualized according to its setting. While some streams of the emerging church have differing perspectives on the authorities and relationship of Scripture, tradition, and experience, they all value diversity. While emerging churches may question the way orthodoxy has been constructed, they remain committed to the core beliefs of the Christian faith as expressed in certain historical creeds of the church. For example, Robert Webber writes, "Stop doing ministry shaped by this or that cultural narrative and go back to the story of the triune God in history, authoritatively recorded in Scripture and summarized in the Nicene Creed (AD 325)."<sup>370</sup> Emerging pastor John Burke puts it this way, "We must let our culture's questions help us better conform to truth and God's revelation."<sup>371</sup> Thus, the typical emerging church contends for both contextualization and orthodoxy.

2. *Spontaneous expressions of creativity.* For emerging churches, creativity is a gift from God that needs and deserves to be exercised in corporate worship. In fact, the use of

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<sup>370</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches*, 199.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

creativity contributes to the church's context and on-going conversation about such issues as God, the human condition, and living life in a broken world. Unlike the elite church, these followers promote the active use of creativity to think about or investigate a particular biblical, philosophical, or theological idea, question, or theme. In fact, they affirm the sensory without being sensational. They recognize expressions of creativity are often able to communicate apart from words.

For example, in an emerging church in Houston, while the pastor speaks, artists are painting. From my observation the artists are interacting with the message, the conditions of the worship service, and the particular situation. Emerging churches recognize what Dewey said many years ago: "There are values and meaning that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence."<sup>372</sup>

The churches' "spontaneity of expression" is admirable. They are organic expressions, taken up in present experience, contributing to the experience of the moment and with each other. Why is this spontaneity of expression important? Consider the words of Dewey:

Staleness of matter and obtrusion of calculation are the two enemies of spontaneity of expression.... But an expression will, nevertheless, manifest spontaneity if that matter has been vitally taken up into a present experience. The inevitable self-movement of a poem or drama is compatible with any amount of prior labor provided the results of that labor emerge in complete fusion with an emotion that is fresh.<sup>373</sup>

As a result of the use of creativity, the worship experience may be different and memorable each and every Sunday.

How local churches treat or react to the spontaneity of expression reveals a lot about their habituated way of seeing and doing and the standard employed by which they

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<sup>372</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 77.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

measure a successful worship experience. In fact, no test surely reveals the one-sidedness of their ecclesiology as its treatment of creativity.<sup>374</sup> For example, by only affirming one prescriptive way of doing church and not allowing the spontaneity of expression to take place within the context of worship, traditional churches are acting out modernistic biases. In fact, because of the traditional church's incorporation of modernism into theology, polity, and practice, emerging churches contend that traditional and seeker-sensitive churches are not able to bridge the culture gap; for they put up unnecessary barriers in the way they communicate the Christian faith (e.g., centralized authority, reason, logic). But spontaneity of expression breaks down barriers as people creatively engage each other using words, art-products, and dialogical teaching in the context of corporate worship. Here's why.

From the insights we have gained about the generations of people since the baby boomers, described as the "emerging adulthood," the "seekers," and the "me-generation," people born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are skeptic about dogmatic claims, are cynical about organized religion, see religious belief as a preference, have a deep appreciation for creativity, and hunger for spirituality that speaks to the whole person, not merely the mind. While churches are unnecessary to them, these younger generations are looking for a context in which to ask and probe into spiritual questions, engage in diversity, and experience creativity in all of its forms. Obviously, emerging churches provide those opportunities.

3. *The value of dialogical instruction.* Teaching by conversation in corporate worship provides the opportunity for the spontaneity of expression to emerge, and more

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 286.

importantly, affords the opportunity to ask the hard questions and probe into an experience with God that transcends into mystery. In contrast to all of the previous churches in our study, emerging churches that use this approach are promoting opportunity to actively participate in the learning experience. No longer is the congregation merely a spectator observing worship. Individuals are able to critically engage with each other on an equal footing in a way that honors tolerance, values people, exposes biases, and promotes the evaluation and justification for assumptions and ideas. Conclusions are tested by group discussion.

The informality of the worship experience promotes accessibility, authenticity, and transparency in a setting where intellectual, moral, and spiritual struggles of the soul are taken seriously and without animosity. One can quietly discover deep questions are not isolated to one person, but perhaps common to many. In fact, no particular theological doctrine is forbidden from discussion. Why? Like Dewey, emerging churches recognize people are in culture, not above it, and are influenced by context, though not necessarily determined by it. For example, Robert Webber notes:

Theology is an ‘adventurous exploration of new horizons.’ Theology is more like a ‘mysterious adventure than a mathematical puzzle.’<sup>375</sup>

Or consider the insights of emerging pastor John Burke who writes:

Because most people I interact with assume religious belief is a preference thing—like preferring blue over green—for them, arguing that blue is better than green (or Christianity is right and other religions are wrong) feels like foolishness. For that reason, we must avoid arguments about religion and get back to the basics of knowing God.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Churches*, 199.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Burke, who contends that our “knowledge is really biased by our cultural upbringing,” wonders if modern systems of theology have blinded us to somehow think that since we have Scripture systematized, we have God figured out.<sup>377</sup> Burke goes on to say:

Postmodern relativism creates a wonderful theological bridge from our culture to the amazing revelation of God. Because in many respects, the Jain parable nails it—we *are* all blind. And on our own, none of us can accurately describe God beyond a blind guess. So the moral fundamental question is, ‘Has God revealed his identity?’ Now we’re on level ground with all the world’s religions.<sup>378</sup>

Therefore, incorporating conversation as an aspect of worship rather than didactic teaching allows for the doing and undergoing to occur for all involved, that is, the pastor and the congregation. Each worship service is an opportunity to be enriched by other’s insights and experiences.

4. *Using history as tools for worship.* Emerging churches utilize historical expressions, practices, and rituals from the past, incorporating them in the present activities of worship. For example, rejecting either/or practices, Robert Webber promotes an idea that has been largely popular in emerging churches: Ancient-Future faith. Webber writes, “An Ancient-Future faith calls upon us all to embrace a both/and future.”<sup>379</sup> An Ancient-Future faith involves three major ideas: affirming the ancient roots of faith, a connection to the universal church in all times and everywhere, and a commitment to an authentic engagement with culture.”<sup>380</sup> Let us briefly explore these three ideas and relate them to the worship experience.

First, this movement calls for a return to the ancient roots of Christianity where early followers emerged from a culture that was religious, spiritual, secular, and pagan. These

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 215.

Christians were able to bridge the culture gap because they affirmed truth and practiced particular contextualization. These factors predate the splits between the Catholic, Orthodox, and the Protestants.

Second, an Ancient-Future faith involves seeking understanding in the particulars while affirming unity in the common tradition. Webber states, “While there is a common tradition that defines us all, there are particular traditions that characterize the diversity we experience within our unity.”<sup>381</sup> Thus, this approach affirms the differing ways of expressing the Christian faith while remaining faithful to its core beliefs.

Third, Ancient-Future faith takes on the ever-present challenge of bridging the culture gap, recognizing that culture itself continually changes. Authenticity and personal transformation are central to facing these cultural changes. But what changes all the time is how the Christian faith is articulated and defended. Webber claims:

The shift in science, from a mechanistic view of the world to the world as a web of interconnections; in philosophy, from rationalism to mystery; in globalization, from monoculture to multicultural; in historical consciousness, from anti-historical to nostalgia for the past; in language, from propositional to performative; in communication, from monologue to dialogue; in technology, from word to image; in society, from individualism to community; and in the rise of terror that moves us from a state of stability to personal vulnerability. Christians can and do affirm these new cultural realities and speak an unchanging faith through them.<sup>382</sup>

Webber goes on to say, “Indeed, what lies before us is an arduous task, a journey through perilous waters that must be navigated with great care and embraced with anticipatory joy.”<sup>383</sup>

As a result of ideas such as “Ancient-Future Christianity,” emerging churches are

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 214-5.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 215.

utilizing ancient, medieval, and Reformation Church activities, practices, and rituals in contemporary activities of worship. For example, emerging leader Karen Ward uses the *Revised Common Lectionary* (Scripture readings from the Consultation on Common Texts) in her weekly services described as a “Mass gathering.”<sup>384</sup> She desires to provide the church a “scriptural diet that is rich and varied enough to prevent anemia, and one that allows for solid spiritual growth over the long haul in the grace and love of God.”<sup>385</sup> The church she leads emphasizes the narratives of Scripture rather than didactic teaching in order to “walk in” that is, participate *in* the stories of faith and God-encounters.<sup>386</sup> Her church also welcome’s people into their community using “an organic and free-range form of the ancient process which the early church called the ‘catechumenate’ [Greek word, “*catecheo*” which means to “sound in the ear.]”<sup>387</sup> They use an experience-based pattern, following the pattern used by Christ and his apostles, by inviting people to join them on their journey. Rather than using a didactic style of simply teaching them doctrine, this church desires to come alongside “seekers” and be a community to them as they embark on a life-altering journey. She states:

We come together as children to be gathered around and taken up into the Big Story told by our Father, which we are invited to hear, touch, taste, smell, and see through the life of Jesus. Then we are provided time and open space to talk and share at the table, to eat by the warmth of the Spirit’s fire.<sup>388</sup>

She goes on to say

At apostles we call our reflections on the Word the ‘reverb.’ Reverb may or may not be a sermon, as a sermon is just one way to break open the Word among many other ways we might use (drama, art, music, discussion, poetry...).<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

This church also incorporates ancient and medieval icons in its worship activities allowing people the opportunity to meditate or reflect upon these depictions. Lastly, Karen reports they are just beginning to investigate how the church community may express itself as a monastic order.<sup>390</sup>

The willingness to utilize historical resources in an effort to engage and enrich the worship experience and church community resonates with Dewey's task of removing barriers where art-products, ancient rituals, and activities have been relegated to separate realms.<sup>391</sup> Many emerging churches are striving to restore the continuity between art-products such as icons that have long been extinguished in many traditional churches since the rise of iconoclasm and religious reductionism in worship. Iconoclasm is the willful removal and even the destruction of religious icons, statues, and symbols for reasons such as idolatry or perceiving them as violations of the Second Commandment, namely, the precept that there shall be no "graven image." This is unfortunate because these art-products (e.g., icons) emerged from the development of religious activities.<sup>392</sup> Like Dewey states:

The collective life that was manifested in war, worship, the forum, knew no division between what was characteristic of these places and operations, and the arts that brought color, grace, and dignity, into them. Painting and sculpture were organically one with architecture, as that was one with the social purpose that buildings served. Music and song were intimate parts of the rites and ceremonies in which the meaning of group life was consummated. Drama was a vital reënactment of the legends and history of group life.<sup>393</sup>

Religious reductionism is committed when the nature of worship is identified with only one activity of worship. Thus, many emerging churches are describing themselves as

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>391</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 2.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

“post-evangelical.”

#### D. WEAKNESSES OF THE EMERGING CHURCH MOVEMENT (S)

Now having highlighted four particular strengths of the emerging movement(s), a Deweyan analysis reveals six problems. Since emerging churches value particular contextualization within a certain community, there may be exceptions. Nevertheless, Dewey’s insights might prove helpful as this pluralistic movement continues to develop.

1. *Problem of dependency.* So much of the creative activities of the worship experience rely upon the pastor or pastoral team in churches where spontaneity of expression does not occur among those gathered. Ironically, like the elite church, the activities are dependent upon the pastor’s supply of creativity or aesthetic experience in preparation. If the leadership falls short of a regular dose of inspiration for creativity, the worship experience that particular week will fall short as well. As a result, the worship experience may not necessarily be organic, but imposed.

2. *Overuse of tension.* Unlike the humdrum church, corporate worship in emerging churches welcome tension. For example, the use of deconstruction in dialogue, the spontaneity of expression, and the use of unfamiliar historical methods all invoke tension in order to challenge worldviews and move congregants to look at the beliefs and practices in different ways. There is value in this approach. Like Dewey states:

Struggle and conflict may be themselves enjoyed, although they are painful, when they are experienced as a means of developing an experience; members in that they carry it forward, not just because they are. There is, as will appear later, an element of undergoing, of suffering, in its large sense, in every experience. Otherwise there would be no taking in of what preceded. For ‘taking in’ in any vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously known. It involves reconstruction which may be painful.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 42.

Notwithstanding, tension can be so great that people are not able to overcome it. When the tension is ongoing, the participants can become weary. For people who have attended any of the churches previously mentioned in Chapter III, this lack of familiarity adds to the tension and can make the experience too foreign. Like visiting another country, the novel ideas and sights and sounds are intriguing. But once the time of vacation has passed, or when we face a crisis or long for a place of continuity, we would not find where tension is emphasized to be a haven. To the movements' defense, the lifetime churchgoers and those between the ages of 40 to 80 are not the targeted audience. But the concern regarding the tension that the emergents especially enjoy remains valid. We will long for continuity and will leave in order to find it. Discussions do not always answer questions fully. Thought-provoking contemporary topics may not give adequate comfort. An ever-changing context can make us long to hold onto a place that feels like home. For example, John Newton's masterpiece, "Amazing Grace" has become a staple of comfort to many throughout the world. Though styles of music have changed immensely since it was written, it is still played whenever people are hurting and need to hear a sound of the familiar. A church that offers deconstruction of ideas and assumptions will likely have a few losses of people who found that the tension was too much.

3. *Unbeneficial dialogical instruction.* There is a serious concern about the importance of conversation of the participants. The conversation will only be as strong as the crowd is alert, educated, comfortable, and informed on the particular topic. It can easily become an unprofitable time of shared ignorance with minimal growth. If the congregants have been raised to question everything, pursue relative truth, tolerate others' opinions at all costs, and spurn harsh authority figures, then a multitude of ideas will come forth. Furthermore, a pastor who is in a position to lead a discussion where his views, no matter how well

formulated, are on an equal plane as his peers in the room, will inevitably struggle in an effort to move forward. As a result, there can be too much emphasis on plural and free participation but not enough on listening or on the quality of discourse. Qualitative instruction will take a great deal of time if it occurs at all because of the time spent listening to all of the other opinions. Finally, it is not unthinkable to foresee one of those opinions, expressed strongly enough, easily leading the church in a direction entirely unorthodox.

4. *Problem of Novelty.* While so much effort is spent on contextualization and being anti-traditional, anti-evangelical, or anti-modern evangelical, many of these churches neglect the strengths or beneficial values of the traditional and seeker-sensitive churches. This becomes all the more interesting when they draw from resources of ancient, medieval, and Reformation practices. Emerging leaders are too quick to assume traditional churches are irrelevant and not meaningful to baby boomers, emerging adulthood, and other younger people. So, as pluralistic as they say they claim to be, emerging churches fail to consider the accomplishment of the church of the modernistic age. Thus, they over-emphasize novelty over and against the benefits and values traditional churches and seeker-sensitive churches have to offer.

For example, approximately forty percent of the local traditional church where I attend is comprised of people who are part of Generation X and emerging adulthood. What is the draw? For one, they find that inductive teaching, which is the one of the greatest strengths of this traditional church, to be profitable. They find the worship experience to be meaningful and practical. Some also find singing the traditional songs and hearing familiar words to be nostalgic and comforting.

Therefore, if emerging churches really value pluralism and contextualization, any cynicism toward traditional expressions of worship should be displaced. As discussed with the elite church, aesthetic experiences can occur in an inductive setting. Moreover, some of these traditional churches are operating within a cultural or sub-cultural context that values the strengths of certain modernist assumptions.

The problem of novelty also generates reductionism. Reductionism finds expression when the value of systematic formulations of theology, inductive study of Scripture, and modern philosophy are displaced in favor of provocative rhetoric, dialogical teaching, and creative and sensory expressions of worship. However, these tools should not be marginalized or rejected for the following three reasons.

First, systematic theology, inductive study of Scripture, and modern philosophy should be considered, as with other historical resources, as *tools* to help us engage in the task before us. Our culture is too precarious to dismiss their usefulness. Like Dewey states, "...the blundering ineptness of much that calls itself judicial criticism has called out a reaction to the opposite extreme."<sup>395</sup> Moreover, "The critic who is not intimately aware of a variety of traditions is of necessity limited and his criticisms will be one-sided to the point of distortion."<sup>396</sup> These tools help us adopt our past, value our mistakes, and serve as warnings as we inquire, engage, and commit ourselves to certain directions within an unpredictable environment.<sup>397</sup>

Second, these ideas, methods, and expressions emerged out human creativity, need, and purpose. Creativity, intellect, collective thought and interaction, and tension and

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<sup>395</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 317.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

recovery were used to bring forth such activities such as the systematizing of Scripture into a coherent system of thought. Activities, rituals, practices, and art-products were created out of a context of need, intelligent inquiry, and curiosity.<sup>398</sup> They are a part of our history, that is, who we are.

And third, we are foolish not to draw from those resources in order to prepare us for the future. Depth of study may be compromised to creative experience, thus resulting in groups of people whose faith is “a mile wide and an inch deep.” In the name of novelty, answers for which the adherents are searching may never be found. Emerging leader John Burke for example, states he is fearful that the emerging church will “cut loose from the authority Scripture in an effort to relate to culture.”<sup>399</sup> Just as the “power of ‘story’ in authentic emerging churches is huge,” the tools of systematic theology, biblical exegesis, and modern philosophy are also beneficial to our situation, the way we direct our inquiries, and our goals.<sup>400</sup>

5. *Aesthetic problem of disorganization.* Dialogical instruction, the spontaneity of expression, the exercise of creativity, and pluralistic activities can become disconnected, disorganized, incoherent, and aimless. When an activity is marked by disorganization, an aesthetic experience will not occur. The one place where experience should not fall apart into disorganization is in the church since the activities are meant to tell a larger story. If this occurs often enough, the people gathered for corporate worship will not only be deeply affected negatively by the experience, but will also become aesthetically anemic.

6. *The problem of narcissism.* Empirical sociological studies are revealing that while

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>399</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 61.

<sup>400</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 79.

these recent generations are open to spirituality and relish creativity, these same “seekers” are also embracing narcissism. For example, in their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell contend that the distinction between self-admiration and narcissism appears to be significantly blurred among Americans. Just as the Greek character Narcissus was frozen by his own self-admiration, unable to intimately connect with anyone outside himself, these recent generations are doing the same.<sup>401</sup> Young people are not just confident they are overconfident, with an over-inflated view of one’s own abilities.<sup>402</sup> Twenge and Campbell write:

The central feature of narcissism is a very positive and inflated view of the self. People with high levels of narcissism—whom we refer to as ‘narcissists’—think they are better than others in social status, good looks, intelligence, and creativity. However, they are not. Measured objectively, narcissists are just like everyone else. Nevertheless, narcissists see themselves as fundamentally superior—they are special, entitled, and unique. Narcissists also lack emotionally warm, caring, and loving relationships with other people. That is a main difference between a narcissist and someone who merely high in self-esteem: the high self-esteem person who’s not narcissistic values relationships, but the narcissist does not. The result is a fundamentally imbalanced self—a grandiose, inflated self-image and a lack of deep connection to others.<sup>403</sup>

As a result, overemphasizing themes such as “self-esteem,” and “loving yourself,” have generated narcissistic values in terms of personal entitlement and self-expression. Unfortunately, these values are leading them to damaging consequences such as doing what benefits the self even if that means others will have to bear the cost.<sup>404</sup> And though a drive to bridge the culture is admirable, a culture that is self-absorbed is going to be a

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<sup>401</sup> Jean M. Twenge and Keith W. Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 18. Their empirical research on the origins of narcissism is worth examining. See chapter 4, “How Did We Get Here? Origins of the Epidemic,” 57-69.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 55.

special challenge for any church, since all churches in this examination agree on the one point that the church's foremost purpose is to worship God, not ourselves.

While emerging churches seek to contextualize their worship to the community, relish opportunity for creativity, the question becomes how different is the emerging church from the culture it mirrors? Is the call for "relevance" a cloak to further inflame narcissistic tendencies? Creative expression, dialogical instruction, and the desire for community can so easily be used as platforms to further contribute to narcissistic behavior such as believing that "they are better than others in social status, good looks, intelligence, and creativity."<sup>405</sup>

How the church addresses narcissism in a context that values self-expression demands regular attention. Why? Because the "actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions..."<sup>406</sup> We have to show them that such things as self-admiration is costly and entitlements such as success is not guaranteed in this life.<sup>407</sup> Life itself is too precarious, too fragile.

#### E. THE FAILURE TO BRIDGE THE CULTURE GAP

Our analysis has revealed two recent reactions to the problems of the traditional church. The seeker-sensitive church and the pluralistic emerging movement have sought to bridge the culture and offer relevant corporate worship. The seeker-sensitive church restructured and reinvented the church to become culturally inviting. Thus, in the name of an open invitation, the architecture was redesigned and anything was removed that might prove to be a barrier to the "unchurched," and performance-drive corporate worship

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>406</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.

<sup>407</sup> Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 54-6.

became the focal point. On the other hand, the emerging movements sought to contextualize themselves to particular communities like a missionary would to a foreign culture in order to bridge the culture gap with an incarnational mindset. Moreover, in response to the influences of modern philosophy and the attitudes and interests of the emerging adulthood, the “seekers,” have sought to create a corporate worship experience utilizing past expressions of faith, pluralistic activities (e.g., stations), and community living in order to integrate both belief and belonging. But I contend while each of these approaches have a number of strengths, they fail to adequately address three underlying and commonsensical issues, namely, the gap itself, the need for adaptation as a core aesthetic value, and aesthetic experience.

1. *Commit reductionism.* While these two movements recognize a gap, they assume it is only a culture gap, thus committing reductionism. For example, the leaders clamor to say that our society is “consumeristic,” “postmodern,” “post-consumeristic,” “relativistic,” or “post-Christian.” Thus, the seeker-sensitive church seeks to appear attractive as possible, competing with other options of entertainment in the community. Then it uses marketing theories to target felt-needs such as “Seven Steps on How to Be Successful at Work.” On the other hand, the emerging church movements appeal to the attitudes and interests of people who are identified with “generation-me.” These “seekers” express the “language of the self as their native tongue.”<sup>408</sup> Good feelings about themselves are the prized virtue. They are filled with “soaring expectations” and are experiencing “crushing realities” for “the gap between what they have and what they want has never been greater.”<sup>409</sup> But by

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<sup>408</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled-and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

addressing their attitudes and expectations, allowing them to have more sensory-filled experiences, these churches still do not address the underlying problem.

2. *Fail to adequately understand the biological aspects of reality.* The gap is much more than avant-garde ideas becoming mainstream, ideological and cultural paradigm shifts, or even consumer trends among the masses. Instead, life itself, that is, the biological aspects of reality, is one that involves discontinuity with our environment.<sup>410</sup> In other words, we are constantly experiencing separation from continuity, fulfillment, and balance. At the same time we have an unconquerable impulse to have ordered relations with our environment.<sup>411</sup>

Evidence for discontinuity is seen and felt when we examine our real human needs. According to Dewey, every real need we have is an authentic lack. For example, the need for food or water demonstrates a lack of it. Thus, every need denotes at least a “temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings.”<sup>412</sup> But this need is also a demand. A demand is a “reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium.”<sup>413</sup> In other words, we are reaching out to fulfill that need. Dewey writes:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life itself grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the condition under which it lives.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

When a person is able to make terms with his environment in a particular setting at a specific point in time, then one secures temporary continuity, stability, or fulfillment. Let us now turn to four aspects of how we might bridge the gap between churches and community.

#### F. HOW TO BRIDGE THE GAP USING JOHN DEWEY

1. *Acknowledge that discontinuity with our environment is inevitable.* The first step in bridging the gap between churches and environment is to accept that discontinuity with our surroundings is inescapable and certain while we tarry on this earth. Dewey states, “Nature is the mother and the habitat of man, even if sometimes a stepmother and an unfriendly home.”<sup>415</sup> As a result, people have real and deep needs.

2. *Target deep needs.* A second and very important step is meeting people’s real needs, that is, existent needs they have living this life. In doing this, the local church will always be relevant to an ever-changing community. For example, we have physical needs such as food, water, and good health. We have existential needs such as meaning, purpose, identity, and fulfillment. And we also have spiritual needs such as absolution, mercy, and redemption.

While providing a criteria for real needs versus felt-needs may prove to be difficult and further inquiry would be needed, we may at least say that real needs go beyond our conscious desires and preferences. Felt-needs are what we consciously desire and change throughout our life. For example, a mother in her mid-twenties is looking for a “mother’s day out” program. A man in his seventies is looking for friends with whom he can golf. On the other hand, deep needs are more general, common to our human plight. Dewey

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 28.

writes:

The first great consideration is that life goes on an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defense but also by conquest. At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges and with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.<sup>416</sup>

Thus, the church will be in a better position to bridge the reoccurring gap by meeting the real needs people possess and not merely targeting felt-needs, even though there may be times whereby both types of needs overlap such as our need for relationships and purpose.

Sure, both seeker-sensitive and emerging churches target needs but they do not adequately understand the nature of discontinuity and continuity as an aspect of reality. This is demonstrated, for example, in the seeker-sensitive church's realization that its experiment targeting felt-needs failed. The people were not qualitatively growing. They were becoming discontent. On the other hand, the emerging church's focus is how to "speak" to this younger generation, to "form a new evangelical identity marked by new insights, new concerns, and new patterns of theological application, worship, spirituality, and ministry."<sup>417</sup> The danger here is that an emerging church can be so ambitious in forming a new identity in an attempt to break away from the old, that it neglects the needs that are presently before it. Moreover, the solutions suggested by emerging churches to bridge the gap is only temporary because it is only offering a new way to do the same things again. If they are only aiming for a new identity they will themselves, once again, be caught up in the same trap as evidenced by the elite, broken, humdrum, sensational, and

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>417</sup> *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 16.

seeker-sensitive churches.

3. *Embrace adjustment as a core condition for aesthetic value.* The third step is for the church to embrace adjustment as a core aesthetic value. On-going adjustment, that is, continual fine-tuning of activities in corporate worship, should be a central value that will assist the church in engaging the desires, inclinations, and interests of *each* generation. Interestingly, adjustment affects both our churches and our situational context; it is bilateral.<sup>418</sup> Marriage is an excellent example of adjustment because it changes us as individuals and the conditions of our environment (e.g., each season of our marriage will bring different looks to our home).

In particular, the emergent movement, the most radical stream among emerging movements, is most problematic because it, like modern theologians did in a previous century (modern theology) is integrating the worldview of postmodernism to the extent that many followers describe themselves as “soft postmodernists.” By embracing a theoretical paradigm like postmodernism, the gap between the local church and ever-changing culture will inevitably reappear or remain. The emergent movement does not adequately consider its constructs, too, will become outdated as the desires and interests of people and culture change. Therefore, if the local church would continually aesthetically adjust to culture, then it will be in a better position to offer an experience that is personally

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<sup>418</sup> In *A Common Faith*, Dewey elaborates on what he means by “adjustment.” He writes:

But there are also changes in ourselves in relation to the world in which we live that are much more inclusive and deep seated. They relate not to this and that want in relation to this and that condition of our surroundings, but pertain to our being in its entirety. Because of their scope, this modification of ourselves is enduring. It lasts through any amount of vicissitude of circumstances, internal and external. There is a composing and harmonization of the various elements of our being such that, in spite of changes in the special conditions that surround us, these conditions are also arranged, settled, in relation to us. This attitude includes a note of submission. But it is voluntary it is something more than a mere Stoical resolution to endure unperturbed throughout the buffetings of fortune. It is more outgoing, more ready and glad, than the latter attitude, and it is more active than the former. And in calling it voluntary, it is not meant that it depends upon a particular resolve or volition. It is a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change *in* will [John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1934), 16-7].

meaningful to each generation. Further, the church will also be in a position to contribute to the community as well.

4. *Value aesthetic experience.* Lastly, the church needs to adequately grasp and value the conditions of aesthetic experience. These two movements fail to adequately address aesthetics in the local church, giving too much attention is given to the conditions that are needed to set the mood to worship God (e.g., use of technology, ambiance, icons, performance) to the detriment of the nature and conditions of aesthetic experience itself. This area of neglect is evident not only in the literature of contemporary church health and growth, but from ecclesiological discourse altogether. There is too much dependency on the pastoral team, technology, or environment. All too easily can these factors, whether intentional or not, impose upon and simulate an aesthetic experience. But the end result is that people have not been adequately fed. If these movements were to understand what it means to “take it all in” and what activity counts as non-aesthetic, then more attention would be given to artistic engagement and aesthetic moments would occur without being artificial or forced.

In the final chapter, we will take a look at all of the investigated churches and movements together, drawing from their strengths and addressing issues in Deweyan terms. We will imagine a new church that incorporates the best of aesthetics to touch the lives of those involved and ultimately bridge the gap and impact the ever-changing life of the community for generations to come.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Three primary lessons may be gleaned from our examination of problem churches. The first lesson is churches fail to adequately understand the nature of aesthetic experience. They focus more on end-results and not on process. The second lesson is if we integrate the strengths of these churches examined, we discover seven truths that if applied, will place local churches in a better position to achieve authentic aesthetic experiences, “to take in” the moment, and experience an immediate delight, a heightened vitality. The third lesson is if churches want to contribute to society, as they once did in generations past, they should seek to generate art-products and participate in activities that will benefit all involved. We will now consider these three lessons more closely.

1. *The nature of aesthetic experience.* What we have discovered in our examination of problem churches is that many do not adequately understand the nature of aesthetic experience. Their willful or non-willful ignorance or their misunderstanding of aesthetic experience has generated aesthetic malnourishment. This is ironic because outside of the church walls people have aesthetic experiences as they go about their daily lives in such areas as cooking, employment, gardening, hobbies, recreation, and sporting events. This neglect has been seen in three different ways.

First, in many of the churches we have examined, for example, the elite, broken, and humdrum, we find that church leadership and its congregation are not typically concerned about what connects one moment of experience with another.<sup>419</sup> They go from one activity to another without any integral momentum. Each activity in the order of the service does

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<sup>419</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 41.

not contribute to the whole experience. In other words, there is no significant movement of experience to aesthetic completion. There is no pervading unity that captures the activity.

What they do count as aesthetic experience is typically cognitive. For example, the exposition of Scripture is considered serious worship. While a pastor may have studied the passage and delivered it with artistic engagement, the music, prayers, and singing are delivered in a manner that is routine and mechanical. No interest is shown in doing well (e.g., music), finding satisfaction in the particular activity (e.g., prayers), or caring for the details or materials with genuine affection (e.g., singing).<sup>420</sup> In sum, the means is not fused with the ends, the medium is set apart from meaning, and the part is disconnected from the whole. Therefore, the experience falls short of what it could be.

These same churches do not deeply consider relationships of experience that link past experiences to the present experience. In other words, how does the past contribute to the present engagement in experience? Each experience is disconnected from the week before. Unfortunately, these types of experiences are forgettable.<sup>421</sup> For example, the church leadership does not review what event or activity was fruitful and what was not. Little or no substantive “fine tuning” in the religious practices is applied.

No intelligent creativity is employed to recognize, modify, or guide the service. How does one aspect of the service connect, contribute, and integrally relate to another? While the leadership may attempt to provide some “thematic connection” such as ensuring the theme or title of certain songs match the central homiletic point of the sermon, aesthetic connectivity and integral momentum are neglected. People walk into the sanctuary. The

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

church goes through the program and they leave. As a result, the worship experience is dead by routine. These churches drift along as the culture continues to change.<sup>422</sup>

Second, we have learned that in sensational and seeker-sensitive churches, imagery, music, performances, inspiring rhetoric, and timed arrangements are all unified to create a memorable experience. Appealing to our interests and desires, these churches are competing with culture or offering something that is counter to culture. But these problem churches focus on our emotions and passion, exalting our sensations to the point that this indulgent experience is equated with having a genuine aesthetic experience. But at the end we discover the spectacle, no matter how emotionally moving or indulgent, leaves us aesthetically malnourished. In other words, we have not been qualitatively changed for the better. Willow Creek Church, for example, discovered this to be the case in its recent statistical research.

Lastly, emerging churches seek to contextualize with their particular context. As a result, many are given to activities that are pluralistic. They are also sensitive to various learning styles and seek to be experiential. But in their focus to contextualize and offer worship that is sensory, experiential, and pluralistic, they still neglect what is before them, namely, the nature and value of aesthetic experience. They are reactionary against traditional and seeker-sensitive models, and their quest for creativity, self-expression, and pluralistic activities falls short of completion when they fail to relate those activities to experience in its integrity. In other words, like the traditional church, if no heightened vitality marks the experience whereby everything is properly related, then it will not reach completion. Every part of the service must contribute to the whole like each brush stroke

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

applied to a canvas contributes to a portrait.

In each of these three cases, namely, churches absorbed by routine activities, indulgent activities, or reactionary activities, they fail to absorb what is before them and move it forward. As a result, people are numbed. In his article, “Dewey and Art,” Irwin Edman’s insights about society can be applied to many of our churches:

In our ordinary activities experience is marked by distortions and dislocations, made for practical or personal, or sentimental or dialectical reasons. Passion drives us to exalt these senses as the chief quality of experience; on the other hand to the intellectual analyst all experience is essentially cognitive. There are in our society occasional orgies of sense without meaning. Among intellectuals there are orgies of abstraction without the vividness of the senses. In ordinary experience or in experience not quite fulfilled there seems to be conflict between the individual and universal, between feeling and thought.<sup>423</sup>

As a result we drift along while ironically enjoying aesthetic experiences in other aspects of life with artistic engagement, earnest zeal, and immediate delight.

When we go about in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, pause, and look around, often times the ordinary becomes extraordinary. In this world filled with brokenness, loneliness, impoverishment, and replete with serious needs, people are reaching out, hungering for and finding temporary moments of continuity, fulfillment, and completion. For example, the housewife decorates her home using her imagination, resources, and energy. Each color is studied with keen interest, joy, and delight. The cook prepares the dish he loves. The fellow takes pleasure in his vegetable and fruit garden in the hot sun. The sage who smokes his pipe-weed with sheer delight before the roaring fire takes in the moment, absorbing the various parts into the total experience. But in those cases, namely, the cook, gardener, and sage, we see artistic engagement. Skill, finesse, and proper balance

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<sup>423</sup> John Dewey: *Philosopher of Science & Freedom: A Symposium*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: Dial Press, 1950), 64.

between doing and undergoing culminate in an experiential moment of meaningful joy. They are earnestly involved, appropriately engaging, and using lessons acquired from the past to engage the present.

To be sure, some of those aesthetic experiences are so intense that it is forever imprinted on our mind such as the sight of the Grand Canyon, the children in a third world village tasting clean water for the first time in their lives, or the birth of one's own child. Nevertheless, in so many of local churches, which for many people is the focal point or heartbeat of their community or the lives of their family, worship is so forgettable, lacking rich aesthetic sustenance that could authentically contribute to or feed their lives.

Therefore, while there can be a certain "aliveness" in the events and activities we experience in common life, problem churches typically neglect, displace, or ignore aesthetic experience. Churches can habituate themselves to the extent that non-aesthetic experiences are normative. Long-time attendees do not even expect a life-changing experience. But the irony is the one place where we should be aesthetically fed in community is in our churches. Why? Because many of our churches' core values involve a congregational commitment to exalt God, meet each other's practical needs, establish endearing relationships, and behave like "salt" and "light" in community (Matthew chapters 5-7). But if the religious activities of the worship experience seem anemic, aesthetic hunger is likely to lead people to activities that contradict the church's values.<sup>424</sup>

But another reason why aesthetic experiences in problem churches fall short is the philosophical and theological study of aesthetic experience is absent from ecclesiastical discourse. To be sure, theological aesthetics is becoming a growing field in recent times,

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<sup>424</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 4.

but what is an aesthetic experience and why aesthetic experience is valuable lacks any significant discussion in the study of ecclesiology. Perhaps we are so concerned about bridging or not bridging the culture gap that we ignore the dichotomy in our lives, that is, having aesthetic experiences outside but not inside of church. We fail to consider the immense value aesthetic experience has in bridging the gap and generating meaning in the lives of people if aesthetic experience is appropriately valued in church activities.

In summary, what we have discovered in our examination of these problem churches is they fall short of what may be described as the “live church.” In other words, unlike the activities of the fox, the cat, or the bird in the wild, these problem churches fail to be “fully present,” that is, all there, in all of activities. Instead, imbalance toward indulgence or mechanical routine results, generating non-aesthetic extremes.

2. *Seven aspects of the live church.* But if we synthesize the strengths of all the churches in this examination and artistically and appropriately employ them in the worship experience with appropriate doing and undergoing, ever so careful to avoid imbalance (e.g., excessive/deficient; mechanical/disorganized), then I suggest that the aesthetic activities, practices, and rituals are likely to come “alive” and be very meaningful for those involved. This “experience of aliveness” may be equated to an evening spent among musicians when they begin to play and soon discover that their instruments, voices, disposition, and surroundings all seem to fit together. The musicians find themselves responding to another. An inter-play develops between them and the energy from their actions and reactions gathers until it climaxes. Afterwards, the musicians say that the jam session was “on fire.” Let us explore these strengths more closely.

First, the live church retains its rich history. Unlike the seeker-sensitive or emerging church, it uses the resources of previous experiences as tools to engage its present

condition. In other words, the church leadership uses the past lessons, no matter how negative or positive, and applies them appropriately in the present experience in order to cultivate benefits for all involved. Therefore, the live church will never abandon or forsake its own past even if a certain era of history becomes unpopular (e.g., modernism).

Second, unlike the elite, broken, and humdrum church, the live church is very observant about its context and relationship to its surroundings. The church watches what stirs about, and the church, too, is stirred.<sup>425</sup> The church looks and listens, consciously engages and appropriately withdraws when in danger. The live church does not hide, run away from, or separate itself from culture. Realizing it is a part of culture it will seek to appropriately adapt its aesthetics to the changes of society. In essence, the live church recognizes a bilateral relationship between itself and its environment.

Third, unlike the humdrum church, the live church does not placate tension. Rather, tension is welcomed as a catalyst to church development and changed lives. Emerging churches' use of dialogical instruction is very helpful in cultivating and addressing tension. When the live church experiences unforeseen tension, it utilizes the historical tools of the past, creativity, technology, and a wide range of resources and experiments, constantly seeking moments of continuity.

Fourth, the live church does not separate one activity from another or emphasize one against the others. Rather, the architecture, fellowship, instruction, music, prayer, and other activities are all related to another. All aspects are carefully examined to see how they might organically relate to the sum-total of the worship experience. Moreover, unlike the elite and seeker-sensitive church, people are not seen as observers, but as participants in

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 18.

that experience. Therefore, the church is ever so careful not to commit reductionism by neglecting one area of activity in favor of another.<sup>426</sup>

Fifth, the art-products such as the architecture, candles, communion table, flowers, digital imagery, icons, pulpit, etc. are not merely studied or thought of as physical objects. Rather they are studied in relationship to their contribution to having a meaningful experience. In other words, the live church does not merely look at an art-product, nor exclusively follow the art-product along to its religious idea, symbol, or ultimate source. Art-products are studied in their relationship to their contribution to present experience. Thus, the live church continually examines how art-products function in experience. If it is discovered that certain art-products no longer contribute to the momentum of experience (e.g., decorative shag tapestries on the side of church walls), then an inquiry will be made. Do the art-products expand our lives in beneficial ways?<sup>427</sup> Experimentation with art-products is a core value of the live church.

Sixth, because the live church recognizes that the biological aspects of life oscillate between discontinuity and continuity, it is especially sensitive to the deep struggles people continually face.<sup>428</sup> The mission is not merely to satisfy people's desires, inclinations, and preferences. Rather, a mindset is adopted that can be described as "incarnational." Realizing that every lack is also a demand, a reaching out for continuity, the live church seeks to focus on those deep needs in order to be relevant in any given generation.

Seventh, adjustment is also a core aesthetic value of the live church. Therefore, like the seeker-sensitive church, the live church will continue to examine, review, and critique its results. As a result of constant inquiry, the live church will always strive to fine-tune its

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 16.

activities, knowing that these adjustments will affect both the church and the community. Therefore, the live church will be in a better position to offer an experience that is personally meaningful to each generation, as well as contribute to the community as well.

Like Dewey writes:

The fact that civilization endures and culture continues—and some times advances—is evidence that human hopes and purposes find a basis and support in nature. As the developing growth of an individual from an embryo to maturity is the product not of efforts of men put forth in a void or just upon themselves, but of prolonged and cumulative interaction with the environment.<sup>429</sup>

Therefore, like a potter shapes his clay with attentive care, insight, and creativity, taking what he has learned in the past and applying into the present situation with a certain anticipation and hope in mind, churches should involve their attendees in the processes of the church whereby they take ownership. In those activities where appropriate energetic doing and undergoing is able to take place, and both relate to each other in an integral way unto completion, the experiences for all involved will be marked by “aliveness.”<sup>430</sup>

3. *Generate an aesthetic legacy.* Lastly, Dewey offers us a historical lesson. He writes:

The Church, even more than the Roman Empire, served as the focus of unity amid the disintegration that followed the fall of Rome. The historian of intellectual life will emphasize the dogmas of the Church; the historian of political institutions, the development of law and authority by means of the ecclesiastic institution. But the influence that counted in the daily life of the mass of the people and that gave them a sense of unity was constituted, it is safe to surmise, by sacraments, by songs and pictures, by rite and ceremony, all having an esthetic strand, more than by any other one thing. Sculpture, painting, music, letters were found in place where worship was performed. These objects and acts were much more than works of art to the worshippers who gathered in the temple. They were in all probability much less works of art to them than they are today to believers and unbelievers. But because of the esthetic strand, religious teachings were the more readily conveyed and their effect was more lasting. But the art in them, they were changed from doctrines into living experiences.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 342.

There was a time Christians encouraged and produced art-products that had very powerful effects on society. History has also shown when art-products are done poorly, aesthetic impoverishment results. If enduring art-pieces are isolated from common life, aesthetic hunger in people and are likely to lead people to embrace art-products that contribute to cultural degeneration. But if local churches will realize the bilateral relationship they have with or to the communities in which they are embedded, the opportunity lies before them to create art-products that will not only contribute to the present society, but also leave an aesthetic legacy for generations to come.

But do not pursue these art products for art-sake alone. Rather, connect them with modes of activity where the practical, the social, and the educative are integrated together, introducing enriching values into the life of the community. Art is not merely an art-product; art is also in the people.<sup>432</sup> Integration is necessary if the church is to generate a legacy worth having.

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 341.

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