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Preface by Leonard Sweet

YOU CAUSED THIS BOOK.

“Isn’t there one book that could explain all this to me?”

“Can you recommend a one-stop introduction to postmodern ministry?”

“Where can I find a bibliography about all this stuff you’re talking about?”

When I compared notes with Brian McLaren about what he was hearing after his presentations, we could reach only one conclusion: People like you were insisting on a beginner’s guide on the pathway of postmodern ministry.

We looked at each other and said, “So which one of us is going to do it?” Then we had a better idea: “Why not tailgate?” And since we are only beginners ourselves, “Let’s invite others to tailgate along with us.” We made a pitch to the editors at Zondervan, who were enthusiastic about the proposal.

We have made this resource as comprehensive in scope in as limited a space as we could. We designed it to be a nonlinear experience, so we hope you don’t start at the beginning, or even start at the end, but work on all the letters according to your curiosity or need. Consider even making it a horizontal experience. Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Truman Capote (for starters) lay down when they wrote. (Next to being strapped into an airplane seat, it’s my favorite writing position.)

Capote called himself “a completely horizontal writer.” Why not try horizontal reading? It’s the test of how well we did. Let us know if we made you saw logs or see stars.

We also packed it full of the literature that has shaped our perceptions. We hope you will find the footnotes a gold mine of resources on various aspects of postmodern ministry. As a living body of mentalities and activities, postmodernity resists being laid out on a slab for spiritual or historical dissection. We don’t agree with all of these resources, nor do we three authors always agree with each other. I for one don’t even agree with some of my own assessments of a couple years ago. But turnovers are to be expected in anything that isn’t stagnant.

The EPICtivities Jerry Haselmayer worked up for your pleasure are intended to jump-start some tailgate parties you can host wherever and whenever your friends gather. Michel Foucault called “modernity” an attitude of mind. We have analyzed postmodernity as an attitude of the mind, body, and soul. We hope these EPICtivities will help you bring mind, body, and spirit together.

This book would not have been possible without a deep compatibility of perspectives between Brian and me. For both of us, the originating doctrine of Christian faith is the Incarnation. Another pastor-friend, Tim Wright, summarizes God’s strategy for reaching the world this way:

God, in the person of Jesus, decided to become like culture. He became like the people he wants to find—so that he can put his arms around them, affirm them, welcome them, and ultimately lead them.¹

From the moment I first heard Brian speak, and then rushed to read his *Reinventing Your Church*² (even though I didn’t

1. Tim Wright, *The Prodigal Hugging Church: A Scandalous Approach to Mission for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Joy Resources, 2001), 17.

like the title and abhorred the book's cover), I knew that I had found a kindred incarnationist. We both allow (as God demands) a role for culture that leaves it in vibrant creative relationship with the church. Too much of the church sees the culture through the gun-slits of its ecclesiastical bunkers.

But we also are convinced that when faith isn't positioned to code cultural resistance, there is a high price to pay. This is the obverse, "not-of" side of the incarnational "in/not-of/but-not-out-of-the-world" strategy for reaching every culture. For example, it is one thing to use the "committee" metaphor to reach an industrialized, modern world, as revealed in this marvelous letter from missionary C. T. Studd to a "Dr. Wilkinson":

The Committee I work under is a conveniently small Committee, a very wealthy Committee, a wonderfully generous Committee, and is always sitting in session—the Committee of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

We have a multi-millionaire to back us up, out and away the wealthiest person in the world. I have an interview with Him. He gave me a cheque-book free and urged me to draw upon Him. He assured me His Firm clothes the grass of the field, preserves the sparrows, counts the hairs of the children's heads. He said the Head of the Firm promised to supply all our need, and, to make sure, One of the Partners, or rather Two, were to go along with each member of our parties, and would never leave us or fail us. He even showed me some testimonials from former clients. A tough old chap with a long beard and hard-bitten face said that on one occasion supplies had arrived and been delivered by black ravens, and on another, by a white-winged angel. Another little old man who seemed scarred and marked all over like a walnut shell said he had been saved from death

2. Brian D. McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). The book was reissued in 2000 with a different cover and a different title: *The Church on the Other Side*.

A is for Abductive

times untold, for he had determined to put to proof the assurance that he who would lose his life for the Firm's sake should find it. He told stories more wonderful than novels and Arabian Nights, of escapes and hardships, travels and dungeons, and with such a fire in his eye and laugh in his voice, added, "But out of all them the Partner delivered me."³

But it is quite another thing to make committees definitive of what it means to be a church, and to so identify an incarnational method with the message itself that the method morphs into the message. When that happens, people start thinking that a church with no committees is a church without Christ⁴ or that Gothic cathedrals were put together by committees. Altogether too much modern fat (like committees and so much more) has accumulated on the body of Christ. Therefore, a recurring theme in this primer is the need for a serious diet and exercise program as we enter this postmodern culture.

As we eye the future and call the church to have an eye to the future, we are excited and at the same time of heavy hearts. We know only too well how Jeremiah could in one breath say, "Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (15:16 NRSV) . . . and the next moment, "My heart is crushed within me, all my bones shake" (23:9 NRSV).

Easter is all about dying into the new. This new world rings with biblical resonance; postmodern culture thrums with possibility. But only if we do more than dip a toe into the mystery of God's continuing incarnation story.

3. As quoted in Norman P. Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (Atlantic City: World-Wide Revival Prayer Movement, 1943), 146–47.

4. God didn't send a committee—for a reason. According to "comitology" (the science of committees) and comitologists (scientists of committees), there are three classic definitions of a committee: "(1) A collection of the unfit chosen from the unwilling by the incompetent to do the unnecessary; (2) A group of people who, individually, can do nothing, but collectively can meet and decide that nothing can be done; (3) A group which succeeds in getting something done when, and only when, it consists of three members, one of whom happens to be sick and another absent." For more such wisdom see Thomas L. Martin Jr., *Malice in Blunderland* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 79.



Preface by Brian McLaren

IT WAS A GREAT honor to be invited to coauthor this book with Len Sweet. In the mid-90s, when my own theology reached a kind of crisis that I later diagnosed as a postmodern “re-booting” of my spiritual computer, I made a list of people I hoped to meet. I felt that I had started asking questions that my modern mentors (who had meant so much to me to that point, and still do) could not answer (because they were not yet asking them). I needed to seek out some new mentors, and Len was the first on my list. I had enjoyed and benefited from Len’s writings, so when I had the chance to hear him and meet him at a conference, I introduced myself and expressed my hope that we could get together sometime. He graciously opened up a lunch meeting, and I drove up to Drew University a while later. He took me to a wonderful Indian restaurant, and the conversation we enjoyed was even more tasty, spicy, and delightful than the curries and chutneys of our meal.

Len and I, in our previous and separate writings, have shared a desire to move beyond a critique of modern ministry (a hobby that can be dangerously preoccupying). Instead, we have tried to be more constructive, sketching out some preliminary lines along which postmodern ministry can develop and in fact is beginning to develop. This book gives us a chance to lodge in key words some of our best thinking so far in this

regard, to help our friends and colleagues in ministry on our shared pilgrimage from our old modern homeland to our new postmodern matrix of ministry.

We are also grateful to Jerry Haselmayer for his collaboration on this project. Len and I both believe that, while books and public speaking open up important new territory for people, the kind of radical transformation needed in our churches and Christian organizations will require more direct, sustained, and personal intervention. Jerry is helping us envision and develop an expanding network of consultants who, we hope, will be available as guides for churches who set out on the journey toward meaningful and effective ministry “on the other side.”

We are keenly aware that this project is a long, long way from being the last word on anything. That’s why we consider this book a primer. Primers are for beginners—such we are, and such we invite you to be, in these exciting times.



P.S. For readers who are sick to death of hearing the word *postmodern* and all its derivatives, we offer this hope: Someday, when enough of us have gotten through to the other side of this transition, we can use *ministry* and *gospel* and *neighbors* and *grace* and other words we love, never needing to use “the p-word” again. Our hope is that through this book we are accelerating the arrival of that day when books on *postmodern* ministry are no longer necessary.

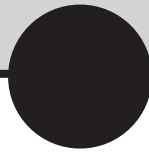


Preface by Jerry Haselmayer

HAVING BEEN GREATLY INFLUENCED by Len and Brian’s writings over the past several years, it is a privilege to collaborate on this book. My role was to create experiential team activities at the end of each chapter that we are calling “EPICTivities.” The hope is that leaders will have a menu to select from that will help their team rise together to new levels of experience and understanding. I believe what people hear can easily be forgotten, but what people experience is hard to forget. We also know there are new EPICTivities to be created, and we hope you, our fellow traveler, will contribute your ideas as well!

I believe our paths have crossed for God’s purposes, in part by the writing of this book and in part for what will yet unfold in the future. My soul is touched by the Scriptures when they say, “One lonely strand by itself can easily be broken, put together two strands and look how much it can withstand. . . . Oh but see the strength and magic when three are in community!” (THE MESSAGE). This passage in Ecclesiastes has been my experience working with Len and Brian. Guys, thanks.

Yes, it is difficult to let go of the familiar and change is often painful—painful for all of us! The opposite is true as well. These are exciting times to be disciples! Think: For a moment, we get to be in the middle of a new thing God is doing. We get to experience in real time God’s unfolding Story.



Acknowledgments

“Certain authors, speaking of their works, say ‘my book,’ ‘my commentary,’” Pascal once wrote. “They would do better to say ‘our book,’ ‘our commentary,’ because there is in them usually more of other people’s than their own.”

This primer on ministry in the emerging culture is not only “our book” in the literal sense, but also “our book” in that its ideas have been drawn from or tested out on multiple sources. Some doctor of ministry students at Drew University first downloaded the entries for the book as “lectures” in an online course (Fred Allen, Lisa Bandel-Sparks, James Beebe, James Biedenharn, Donna Ciangio, Cathy Cook, Rhonda Cushman, Louis DelTufo, Chris Hammon, Vicki Hollon, Chris Hughes, James McClain, Richard Mitchell, Grant Nicholls, Randall Rogers, and Charlie Weir). Leaders and congregations from various denominations and non-denominations helped us understand the shape of the emerging church in their own colors and configurations.

A special thanks to Carl Savage, whose investment in this project led to some advice we didn’t take but sometimes wish we had. Why not order the letters of the alphabet, he suggested, by their frequency of usage (which would mean starting with “e”) or anything but the ordinary “a-b-c-d-e-f-g”? We’re sorry we didn’t listen to you, Carl.

It is nice being able to outsource your worries ... and references and quotes and footnotes. Betty O’Brien’s contributions to the bottom of the page rival anything at the top.

William Wordsworth’s sonnet “A Parsonage in Oxfordshire” celebrates a clergyman’s garden where “no distinguishable line” divides garden from graveyard: the lands of living and dead, “friends and neighbors” in both categories, “confound/Their several features.” While we have dedicated this book to those tending the gardens of the living, we honor those who for 2,000 years have prepared the garden and passed it on for us to tend and till. We begin by referencing our reverence and respect for them and their living example of the truth behind this book: If we will do what we’re called to do, God will do what God has promised to do.



Introduction

THIS IS A PRIMER WITH A MISSION.

There is the story of a motorist who asked a West Virginia farmer for directions to a certain place. After musing for a few moments, the farmer replied: “If I was wanting to get there, I sure wouldn’t start from here.”

None of us get to choose our starting place. So we have to start where we are, even committed Christians like us.

God doesn’t seem to give his people special exemptions from history or shortcuts in the spiritual journey. The church may think that time can stand still for it the way the sun stood still for Joshua in the Old Testament story (Josh. 10). But even Joshua only got a delay, a short reprieve from the inexorable inrush of the future. Soon enough the sun started moving (or the earth started turning) once again.

True, more than a few Christians have hit the Pause button in the 1950s or 1970s or 1990s, and some of them seem to be doing just fine. But it is inevitable: The sun will start moving for them soon enough, and they will have to wake up and see where they are and realize it is not where they want to be. And their journey will begin.

That is where this primer fits in. Primers are beginning books: ABC’s. They are for kids, beginners, stuttering strugglers trying to learn the first syllables of a new language. And that’s us—a few of us, only a few so far. But more and more of us are realizing that the world has changed, a new language has

emerged, and if we want to communicate, we need to speak it. So we have to start where we are, with what we know, embarking on the journey before us.

So we open our hearts to where we are.

Transitioning

Let's talk about the starting place God has put us in.

We are living literally "on the edge," or in ecological terms (terms that are particularly useful in these times), in an "ecotone" between Past and Future, between Modern and PostPostmodern. Ecotones are places where two or more ecosystems come together, a transition between two entities that blend into one another where they meet. San Francisco Bay, the largest estuary in the western U.S., for example, is an ecotone: a place where fresh water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers meets the salt water of the Pacific Ocean. Wetlands are ecotones: transitions between dry land and deep water. Hydrothermal vents at the ocean floor are ecotones: transitions where sea water meets the earth's interior.

You can't get from one place to another without going through a transition. Transitions imply endings and beginnings—some things come to an end, some things begin. Transitions are times of great creativity and change. Transitions are renewing. Transitions are gone through at different speeds by different organisms. Most of us run a transition deficit most of the time—that is, we lag behind the learning/practice/reality curve of most situations.

The dawning of Millennium Three is such a transition: an ecotone between the modern era and a time we cannot yet define. So we paradoxically inaugurate this new era by identifying it by what it isn't: postmodern.¹

1. Daniel Bell first pointed out the paradox of our naming in *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

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Thou permittest to be known not what Thou art, but what
Thou art not; not what Thou art, but that Thou art.

—A PRAYER OF JOHN SCOTUS ERIGENA²

It would be nicer if we could call our times pre-something, but alas, maybe our great-grandchildren can look back and do that. Not us. Not here. Not yet. We're stuck with "the posties." Other "post" candidates include post-capitalist (Ralf Dahrendorf), post-bourgeois (George Lichtheim), post-civilized (Kenneth Boulding), post-collectivist politics (Samuel Beer), post-industrial (Daniel Bell), post-ideological (Lewis Feuer), post-literate (Marshall McLuhan and John Leonard), post-Puritan, post-Protestant, post-Christian (Martin Marty, Winthrop Hudson), post-Constantine (Jim Wallis), and post-foundationalist (Stanley Grenz). Zygmunt Bauman, who has written extensively on post-modernism, says he now prefers the phrase "liquid modernity" to describe what has happened over the past 20–50 years.³

There are both problems and possibilities to ecotones. Whether in biology or history, edges support great diversity, facilitate movement and energy, and are highly fertile. Some life thrives on the edges where conditions are most volatile. Fishermen, for example, discover that the best fishing is at the edges—edges of drop-offs, edges of aquatic vegetation. "Fishers of men," as Jesus called his followers, similarly can discover that there is no better time to be in ministry than now.

But life on the edge increases predation, parasitism, and fragility. Many species don't survive on the edge. And ecotones are easily damaged: The San Francisco Bay has lost 60% of its

2. John Scotus Erigena, *Periphyseon, or The Division of Nature* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 700.

3. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000). See also Leonard Sweet, *AquaChurch: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2000). Ron Martoia in *Morph!* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2002) calls this the "Aesthetic Age."

water area to land reclamation over the past 140 years. So there is some truth to what many of us say on our worst days: There is no worse time to be in ministry than now.

We are living on the edge, in an ecotonic interregnum unique to the millennia of emerging human civilization. Of course, we are not telling you anything you don't already know. We've said it before: The world has come to an end. The world you and I were prepared to lead and minister in is over. We now function in worlds that are either defunct, in ruins, gasping their last breath,⁴ or not yet built.⁵ We stumble constantly over the disintegrating elements of a worn-out paradigm.

The social, economic, political, and ideological world we once knew has been done in by new turns in sign theory (including mathematics, color theory, music theory), physics, metaphysics, cosmology, biology, and philosophy. In philosophy, the foundations have been spirited away by postfoundationalism. While much of the church is trapped in foundationalist thinking, where truth is "out there" to be hauled in by objective methods, the foundationalist model cannot hold up under either post-modern or biblical hermeneutics.

It is hard to find scholarship that is not destabilizing assumptions about rationality and challenging intellectual categories

4. Gilbert Adair, in *The Postmodernist Always Rings Twice: Reflections on Culture in the 90s* (London: Fourth Estate, 1992), 15, calls this transitional period "the last gasp of the past."

5. Thomas Hohstadt, *Dying to Live: The 21st Century Church* (Odessa, TX: Damah Media, 1999); Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Alan Roxburgh with Mike Regele, *Crossing the Bridge: Church Leadership in a Time of Change* (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2000); Chuck Smith Jr., *The End of the World—As We Know It: Clear Direction for Bold and Innovative Ministry in a Postmodern World* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001); Harry Lee Poe, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Erwin McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001); Michael Slough-ter, *The unLearning Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001).

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inherited from the Enlightenment.⁶ Nearly every field is being redefined. An old Oxford Dictionary defines a community as “a body of people living in one place, district, or country.” As outmoded as that definition of community is our understanding of how to do ministry in this new world.

So how can this be such a palmy day for ministry, you counter, when we who minister are the products of a dying social and intellectual order, when almost everything we thought we knew now seems wrong? The school of declinology has some powerful statistics on its side. Ninety-eight percent of U.S. churches have less than 300 in attendance on any Sunday morning; 85% of these experience a net loss or no net gain in membership each year; 2000 new churches are started each year; 6000 are closed permanently. On any given Sunday, more people in London visit Ikea than all the churches of London combined. Once the heart of Lutheranism, Leipzig is now nearly 90% atheist or agnostic.⁷

Yet living in the “last gasp” of anything means living in the first breath of something new (especially for believers in resurrection). It is the first breath of a new paradigm (Thomas Kuhn), a quantum leap (Neils Bohr), a form of punctuated equilibrium (Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge), a new dawn (Sweet)—a leap of knowledge, we believe, that is most comparable to the Athenian classicism of the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. or the Renaissance and Reformation. God will not be without a witness in this future. The question is whether the church as it is will be willing to unlearn what it knows so it can learn to become the church it must become . . . so as to be God’s witness in this future. Part of living on the edge today is learning to function on the edge of ignorance.

6. For more, see Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

7. Uwe Siemon-Netto, “Minefield to Mission Field,” *World* 15 (14 October 2000), 25–27.

We count ourselves among a growing cadre of Christian leaders who are enormously enthusiastic about this future, but our intent is not to take the edge off living on the edge. The heroine in Margaret Drabble's *A Natural Curiosity* says, "England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out, post-imperial, post-industrial slag heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons."⁸

The same basic adjectives can be applied to our postmodern landscape.⁹ We identify with that commencement speaker who began his speech to the graduating class with these words: "My advice to you young people who are going out into the world today . . . don't go."

Living on the edge is like living on the ledge, which means one can easily topple off into the abyss. Living on the ledge means one lives at knife-edge where one can easily be torn to shreds. Living at the precise point where two things come into contact and don't overlap means one has to go one way or the other. Scissors are useful, but we can't recommend living in between the blades.

Yet, saying all this, we say it again: There is no more exciting time to be in ministry than now when the entire planet seems poised at the edge of a profound transformation. The rest of the quote from Margaret Drabble conveys our sentiments exactly: "It's not a bad country at all. I love it." Or to paraphrase 2 Corinthians 6:2: *Now Is the Time* (literally, "now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation"). Now . . . today . . . this moment . . . is the time of salvation. This is our moment—to live momentarily in eternity—to live eternity in *our* moment.

It's as simple as that.

It's as exciting as that.

8. Alix Bowen, as quoted in Margaret Drabble, *A Natural Curiosity* (New York: Viking, 1989), 308.

9. Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

Better Days Ahead

We believe that the postmodern condition, rather than being a threat to Christian theology, can actually return us to the roots of our faith and reinforce many of Christianity's primary concerns. It is not just that a theistic worldview continues to make sense in a postmodern world. A biblical worldview seems almost tailor-made for the emerging culture.

We believe that there are better days ahead for the church of Jesus Christ in all its forms . . . if we are willing to adapt our forms to seize the opportunities these new conditions present to us. If, however, we are prone to rigidly and unthinkingly defend old forms, we will sadly discover, as Jesus indicated, that we have three options:

1. We may reject the new wine of the gospel and stay with an old wine of modern religion that is easily contained by our cherished, inflexible forms.
2. We may try to contain the new wine of the gospel in old familiar forms—and as a result lose both.
3. We may trade in our old forms for new forms—and see better days.

Cautious critics will counter that there are huge risks associated with engaging postmodern culture. To mention but one: There is the danger of syncretism—mixing, adulterating, or diluting the gospel with foreign elements that weaken, damage, or distort its integrity.

Of course, the critics are right—this is a great danger. But then again, one might respond, Are these critics equally vigilant regarding the ways in which they themselves may have already accommodated to *modern* culture? And if they have themselves fallen prey to an unconscious modern syncretism, how do the postmodern pioneers know which of their warnings and concerns deal with departures from the gospel and which with departures from modernity? Could some of the very splinters in

the eyes of postmodern pioneers also be planks in the eyes of their modern critics?

Make no mistake: Those who do engage the emerging culture risk being attacked as dumbed-down theologians or wild-eyed mavericks. We shouldn't be surprised at these attacks. Our history tells us that pioneers can expect chiding . . . and arrows in the back. For example, in 1792 William Carey preached a sermon from Isaiah 54:2: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtain of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes" (KJV). The result of this sermon was the creation of the Baptist Missionary Society, and a new era in missions was born.

Was Carey, "the father of modern mission," lauded for his courage in 1792? Not at first! "When they came to deliberate, the old feeling of doubt and hesitation predominated."¹⁰

Similarly, was Peter lauded for bringing the gospel to Cornelius, as related in Acts 10? Not at first!

Was Hudson Taylor lauded for his identification with the Chinese people? Not at first.

More recently, was Chuck Smith Sr. lauded for welcoming in hippies and the Jesus People? Or Bill Hybels and Rick Warren for being gentle and respectful toward "seekers"? Not at first.

Eventually the church comes around. But at first, a lot of arguments and arrows are slung about the legitimacy of exploring new territory.

Remember the situation in Acts 15 when the early apostles argued over whether Gentiles who were coming to the faith had to be circumcised first? That was an argument worth having, an argument that needed to happen.

10. As quoted in S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey: D.D., Fellow of Linnaean Society* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 84. For an account of the sermon and its aftermath, see 80–85.

Introduction

Did the early church fathers welcome Gentiles as partners in Christ? Not at first.

Yet the book of Acts gives us the eventual outcome of this first major church battle: Christ, the Jewish Messiah, has come as Savior of the world to enter every culture as it is in order to help it become what it can and should become. Gentiles do not need to be culturally circumcised or Judaized to follow Jesus.

If Luke were writing a new volume of Acts today, maybe he would record the corresponding argument: Does a postmodern first have to become modern in order to become Christian?

We believe the answer will emerge along the lines of this paragraph by emerging postmodern theologian Jonathan Stuart Campbell:

The postmodern crisis calls for nothing less than a complete repentance (metanoia)—a transformation of the mind and a thorough change of heart. The church must come to the harsh realization that in many ways the church has been influenced more by modernity than by the life of Jesus and patterns of the early church. Therefore, renewal is not enough. Nothing less than a radical reorientation is needed for the church to break free from the modern influences. Just as Gentiles can now receive salvation as Gentiles, so postmoderns have a right to be followers of Jesus, without having to become modernists or to become institutionalized.¹¹

It is time for the church to hear that Carey sermon again. Scholars are now beginning to see what William Carey saw more than 200 years ago: Putting faith and culture together is a missiological problem.¹² Will our missiological future fall to the level of this sad prediction articulated by Ronald Cole-Turner?

11. Jonathan Stuart Campbell, "The Translatability of Christian Community: An Ecclesiology for Postmodern Cultures and Beyond," (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, 1999), 100–101.

12. Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

It is altogether too likely that the church will marginalize itself in the role of chaplain, picking up the pieces, caring for the bruised, mopping up the damage, but never engaging the engines of transformation themselves, steering, persuading, and transforming the transformers.¹³

This is not the first missiological crisis the church has faced, and it may not be the last. But it is proving to be a very difficult one for church establishments. Consider the 100 Asian bishops summoned to the Vatican in 1998 to explain why Christianity was making such little headway in Asian cultures. In their response, the Asian bishops admitted to chafing under the bit of “Roman imperialism.” Some of the first to speak were the Vietnamese bishops:

Western, and especially scholastic, theology is not adapted to the religions of Asia because it is too rational. For the Asians, one cannot analyse the truth nor explain the mystery. And there is a preference for silence over words and not getting entangled in quarrels over words.¹⁴

The Franciscan Bishop of Naha, Bernard Toshio Oshikawa, spoke for the majority of the bishops when he called for a “radical decentralisation of the Latin rite” (“bishops are not branch secretaries waiting for instructions from headquarters”) and for greater cultural indigenization: “The language of our theology, the rhythm and structure of our liturgies, the programme of our catechesis fail to touch the hearts of those who come searching.”¹⁵

The bishops’ warnings and forewarnings are similar to what you will read in this book. Religious leaders (i.e., Roman

13. Ronald Cole-Turner, “Science, Technology, and the Mission of Theology” in *God and Globalization: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse with Don S. Browning (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 2:143.

14. “Look at It Our Way: Asian Bishops Respond to Rome,” *The Tablet* (2 May 1998), 571.

15. As quoted in *The Tablet* (2 May 1998), 565.

authorities) “often don’t know the language and the culture of [our] country.”¹⁶ In the words of the Philippines bishops, the “Christian life” must become “‘at home’ in Asia.” In many ways we are but stating the obvious: The Christian life must become “at home” in the emerging culture. But the obvious has not been integrated into our systems, thinking, and strategies.

We are still in the earliest stages of this unfolding conversation. No one has The Program or The Five Easy Steps for doing postmodern ministry. And no one ever will, because those formulaic approaches are themselves part of the fading world. That is why our format is a kind of trick. This book is organized around the ABC’s, and ABC’s sound simple, but really they aren’t. True, we learn our ABC’s as children, but we all spend our whole lives learning to *use* them, combining them into words and sentences, books and poems, queries and statements of infinite variety.

First Words, Not Last Words

This format makes sense for our subject, in this liminal time when we have glimpses and fragments, not programs or five easy steps.¹⁷ We are uttering first words, not last words; garnering first images, not lasting impressions. We hope the insights you gain here can be combined into meaningful and practical ideas for ministry where you live. If you have ideas to add, or maybe new entries for the primer, or maybe even “yes-but-this-is-also-true” paradoxes to offer, we hope you will contribute them via a website for emerging culture citizens (*emergentvillage.com*). We invite your insights, push-backs, and perspectives, because, again, we don’t believe these ABC’s are the last word on emerging ministries.

16. Ibid.

17. We have been inspired by Stanley J. Grenz’s excellent aid to understanding the intellectual and philosophical world of postmodernism in his work *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) and by “The ABCs of Ministry in the 21st Century” by David Hopkins (College Class of 2000), found in the online magazine *Next-Wave*, www.next-wave.org (January 2000).

*Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten
die Grenzen meiner Welt.*
The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

—LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1922)¹⁸

This primer was created in partnership. Len Sweet offered a first draft, and Brian McLaren added elements, especially focusing on how Len's insights translate into church- and street-level ministries.

We think this primer can also best be used in partnership. That is why we include with many of the entries an EPICtivity compiled by Jerry Haselmayer for study groups, leadership retreats, and staff meetings so groups can experience the kind of partnership and synergy in studying this book that the authors did in producing it.

Perceptive readers will notice that there are apparent contradictions within these pages. Be assured that most, at least, are not accidental. Where such plural versions of postmodernity are found,¹⁹ the reader is invited to ponder the mystery (or laugh) rather than resolve the tension. We are emboldened to attempt a pen-flashed spiritual geography of postmodernity in the spirit in which Dr. Johnson defended dictionaries: "Dictionaries are like watches," he wrote. "The worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true."

18. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [5.2], 2d ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1933), 149.

19. This is precisely why some refuse to use the word *postmodern*. William J. Abraham refuses to speak of contemporary culture as "postmodern" because it "posits a monolithic generalization which is deeply distorting. . . . If we look at our culture as a whole, we are confronted by a *discord* of voices, of worldviews, of moral traditions, of lifestyles, and of inner informal logics which cannot be flattened out into a comprehensive theoretic analysis—whether intellectual, economic, or sociological." See William J. Abraham, "C. S. Lewis and the Conversion of the West," in *Permanent Things: Toward the Recovery of a More Human Scale at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew A. Tadie and Michael H. Macdonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 271.

Introduction

We hope you will go through this text at your own pace, starting where you need to, ending where you want to. We hope you will read it any way except from A to Z. (Consider reading it in the order of the most-used letters to the least-used, demonstrating a nonlinear linearity: ETAIONSHRDLUCMF-GYPWBVKXJQZ.) We hope to open a passageway between modernity and postmodernity, to offer a tour of this ecotone.

We are making every effort to be among the postmoderns. We never want to be postmodernists. Our aim is biblical integrity and cultural indigeneity: Not a first-century church reproduced in the 21st century, but a 21st-century church incarnating Jesus' presence and biblical values, leaning forward into God's gift of the future.²⁰

We want to do for our day what our ancestors did for their day. Rather than despair and curse the darkness, they released the Christ within them (Col. 1:26), who then changed the world.

20. Del Birkey, *The House Church: A Model for Renewing the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 28.



A is for Abductive Method

Deductive method: Start with abstract principles and build toward concrete reality. (Preachers use this method when they begin with doctrine and move to application.)

Inductive method: Start with concrete reality and build toward abstract principles. (Preachers use “biblical induction” when they observe Scripture, then articulate doctrines or principles based on their observations. Induction is what a doctor does with your body to determine what’s wrong with you).

Abductive method: Seize people by the imagination and transport them from their current world to another world, where they gain a new perspective. (Preachers use this method when they speak in parables. These sermons are so different from either inductive or deductive that some practitioners are calling them, not sermons, but “phd’s,” or “post-homiletical discourses.”¹)

Abductive reasoning (a seismic little phrase coined by the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce)² has powerful implications for preaching—and all communication, really. To go abductive, get rid of your inductive/deductive outlines and points and make your sermons pointless! In other words, don’t build your messages around analysis (the A-word of modernity), but instead, build them around an abductive experience, one that takes people out of their current world of assumptions and issues, of boredom and anxiety. Instead of asking yourself before creating a sermon [note: we didn’t say

1. This is a phrase coined by Episcopal priest Jim Beebe of Akron, Ohio.

2. K. T. Fann, *Peirce’s Theory of Abduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). Compare Peirce’s abduction with philosopher/psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection; see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

A is for Abductive Method

“writing a sermon”], “What’s my point?” ask yourself, “What’s my image?” or in more musical terms, “What experience do I want to compose?”

Rather than leading your hearers along in an orderly, step-by-step, predictable, reasoned argument, like a lawyer before a jury—proving and moving on, proving and moving on—seize them by their lapels, like a friend in a crisis. Grab them by the scruff of the neck (their imagination) and throw them into something they never expected.

Surprise and unpredictability are the key elements to the abductive method. You can’t abduct someone if they’re expecting it. This unpredictability is the opposite of modern approaches to preaching, where you set up something very predictable, such as “I’m going to define the problem, analyze the causes of the problem, and offer the steps to solving the problem” or “I’m going to name the topic and then break the topic down into subtopics and illustrate and apply each sub-point.” These approaches are clear, useful, good—but predictable and of limited effectiveness in the emerging culture.

I’ve learned that if you’re really wanting to get a message across, it has to go down with a sweetening dollop of comedy. You’ve got to keep reminding yourself that your point has to be a pill in the dog’s food.

—COMEDIAN/TV HOST BILL MAHER³

Disorientation, astonishment, amazement, surprise—all these things stimulate the abductive process. You abduct your hearers with a metaphor, a problem, a shocking or poignant story, a question or puzzle or paradox, and you beam them up into the spaceship of an unexpected experience. The experience

3. Bill Maher, as quoted in an article by Larry Platt in the magazine *George* (December/January 2001), 98.

may come in the form of a thought-game or search (great abductive activities), like these:

- What would you do if you were given five years off work and unlimited funds and this assignment: Be as happy as you can?
- Why do many Christians feel bored with the Bible?
- Why do you think more about sex or chocolate than sharing your faith with friends?

Or it may come in the form of a story: There once was a man who had two sons . . . a sower went out into his field to sow . . . I was stuck in traffic the other day, when suddenly a large black bird landed on my hood. . . .

Then the abductive message unfolds. Rather than following analytical points, it goes through turns, switchbacks, leaps, rests, sidetracks—the way a conversation does—until you are “abducted” into an experience that takes you outside yourself. (If you need examples, try Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon monologues.)

By the way, Peirce argued that the first person in history who fully developed and deployed this “abductive method” was Jesus of Nazareth. “Without a parable he told them nothing” (Matt. 13:34).

(So after you try a Lake Wobegon monologue, try a parable of Jesus.)

A is for Attention

● Becoming the scarcest resource in the emerging culture. Therefore the most coveted and costly.

Why did Procter & Gamble give \$5 billion in cash to drug-maker Bristol-Myers Squibb in early summer 2001? To buy Clairol, primarily for their hair dye products. Hair colors now change with

each season. Why? To be noticed. To gain attention.⁴ Postmoderns pay big money to force new kinds of attention.

Big money is spent on attention management—getting you *to* and protecting yourself *from* these two words: “Pay Attention.” Look for the replacement of the “experience economy” with what architect William J. Mitchell calls “an economy of presence,”⁵ in which the variety of ways of “being present” is only matched by the variety of means of “attendance.” In the emerging culture, to “pay attention” is almost a kind of offering—a sacramental gesture of self and sacrifice. The cumulative effect of attention avalanches will be able to change the world.

Attention is the critical resource for postmodern evangelists. Modern evangelists needed a loud voice, a forceful close, an amplifier, a microphone, an organ to play “Just As I Am”—and maybe a couple of clean jokes and clear diagrams. In contrast, postmodern hearers generally won’t pay attention to you until you shut up, turn off the amplifier, and “pay” them in the priceless currency of respectful attention, compassionate listening. Then, try whispering.

A is for Augmentation

All areas of life are being “supersized,” “powerized,” and “mega-fied”—an enhancement phenomenon called augmentation. It’s not as if this hasn’t happened before. In the modern era, human intelligence was augmented through notes, reminders, paper, watches, alarm clocks, calculators, computers. Our brains are being augmented today by the silicon/software partnership.

4. To those skeptics who say that the global market for hair colorants, the fastest-growing segment of the \$37 billion hair-care industry, reflects an aging boomer population, Clairol reports that their fastest growth is coming from the 14-to-24 age group, “where the prime objective is to be noticed.” See “Fast-growing Business,” *The Economist* (26 May 2001), 68.

5. William J. Mitchell, *E-topia: “Urban Life, Jim—But Not as We Know It”* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 129–44.

But augmented reality is now taking unprecedented and unpredictable forms through the merging of genetic and digital technologies and computer-brain interfaces. Need an improved heart? Implant a pacemaker or defibrillator. Need an improved chest? Implant some silicon. Need improved computer skills? Try some software agents or avatars (digital butlers) that act on your behalf and simplify every area of your life. Need improved memory? Implant. . . .

Enhancement technologies are not just rewriting the laws of Mother Nature. They are renegotiating our understandings of self, society, community, even soul. Where does the “true self” end and the “augmentation” begin? Is the augmentation now a part of the self? If so, what of words like *identity* and *integrity*, not to mention *soul*? This blurring of boundaries between the natural self and augmented self is revolutionary enough. But we have only just started down the trans (transnational, trans-cultural, transethnic, transgenic, transhuman) track.⁶

Every augmentation is an amputation. The adoption of pocket calculators diminished our mental skills at mathematics. The typewriter and computer diminished our capacity for beautiful calligraphy.

There are two immediate implications of augmentation for emerging ministry. First, we need to acknowledge the tradeoffs of our augmentation-induced amputations. For example, we have augmented our ability to travel by cars and airplanes, but have amputated our ability to be rooted anywhere in particular for very long. We have augmented our voices through amplifiers and speakers, but have amputated our ability to listen and be silent. We have augmented our ability to stay in touch with one another through email and cell phones, but have amputated our ability to be alone. We have augmented our ability to be amused and occupied by video games and 67 channels of cable

6. Yet we are a lot farther down the road than most people realize. USAmerica has already grown some 3.5 trillion genetically modified plants since 1994.

TV or 128 channels of satellite TV, but have amputated our ability to . . . to . . . to do whatever creative things that people did before these augmentations came along. (What *did* they do, anyway?)

We have augmented our ability to feed people with pizza and subs and take-out Chinese or Thai food in those little white cardboard cartons with wire handles. But have we lost something precious in amputating potlucks and the home-baking of bread in old-fashioned hospitality? Emerging leaders need to ask these kinds of questions, because when augmentations increase, so do amputations.

Second, we need to move beyond a naive modern optimism regarding new augmentations. Not all enhancements are enchantments. We need to anticipate the costs of benefits.

For example, back in the 1960s one particular Mennonite church augmented its communication system by handcrafting (as you'd expect) beautiful pigeon-hole-style wooden mailboxes, one for each member. Whenever anyone had a message for a fellow church member, he or she would simply slip it into the appropriate box, a clear benefit to communication. But at what cost? The church's current pastor hates those mailboxes. Why? Because every newcomer to the church is unintentionally excluded from the communication system. The system was designed for a non-growing church; it was not expandable, so it reinforced a static mindset in the members. The cost of the benefit has been high. The pastor now wishes the church would amputate the outmoded augmentation and reach for a new one. (Maybe an email list? But email brings its own amputations, right?)

Consider this: A time is coming (and now is) when you can take a pill to reduce your sex drive and then take another to "turn it on" again. Would taking self-control augmentations make you a better Christian, or a worse one? Would taking medications (or so-called "natural supplements") that elevate your mood augment your "love, joy, peace" quotient, thus

making you more Christlike? What would be the cost of the benefit? You can already pay \$3000 and get the sex of a child you want.⁷ Would this build a better Christian family?

The ethics of augmentation will open a bigger and bigger barrel of monkeys, and it won't all be fun. Using technology to augment relationships or to repair something to normal is not an issue. There are reproductive technologies, such as *in vitro fertilization* (IVF). But there are also genetic technologies, which actually alter the shape of future organisms.

Whether or not to “repair” to supernormal and transnormal (making people “better than well”⁸—more musical, more intelligent, more athletic) will be one of the key ethical issues for our 22nd-century kids. Princeton biologist Lee Silver envisions a two-class system: the genetically enhanced “GenRich” existing alongside and lording it over poorer “Naturals.”⁹

What do you see? Which would you be—a “GenRich” or a “Natural”?

EPICtivity A: Augmentation

The early design of tractor trailers—semis—had a very flat front, and for many years different designs were unheard of.

A new design with a more rounded front end was developed but was shunned by many truck drivers as a fad. Resistance dissipated when it was later proven that the design change significantly increased performance and miles per gallon. The change

7. This is offered by a process called “Microsort” available from the Genetics and IVF Institute in Fairfax, Virginia, which separates male from female sperm. For more on this, see “The Politics of Genes: America’s Next Ethical War,” *The Economist* 14 (April 2001), 21–23, esp. 22.

8. The phrase is that of Peter D. Kramer in *Listening to Prozac* (New York: Viking, 1993), 41.

9. Lee Silver, *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World* (New York: Avon, 1997), 4–7.

A is for Augmentation

represented only about a 10% difference to the design. For a small change the outcome was huge!

Discuss the following questions in your group:

- What do you think caused the most emotional resistance (not air!) when the new model was first introduced?
- What would the impact have been if the changes were never initiated?
- How does this EPICtivity relate to your church?
- What 10% change can you make in a current project you are working on?
- What will the augmentation potentially amputate? Can you live with this? Why? Why not?