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BOTTOM-UP METHODOLOGIES IN EMERGING MODELS

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Thomas S. Cahoon

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### **Abstract**

The post-modern turn in the millennial generation has prompted a response toward religious and organizational authorities, whose organizations do not keep with the changing demand of post-modern individuals. The shift in preferences is marked by a movement from top-down hierarchical models, toward a de-centralized, bottom-up style demonstrated in recent movements. This paper examines the shift of doctrine and praxis within the American evangelical church and a simultaneous development of new methodologies in social justice organizations in these response movements.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the twenty-first century a response to normative practices in American evangelical church life has emerged from writers, pastors and Christian practitioners seeking to better serve the needs of post-modern Christians. This movement has been termed the “emerging” church,<sup>1</sup> and the topic of emerging doctrine and practice has worked its way into academic discussion. I was first introduced to the emerging church as a curious undergraduate at a conservative Christian university in the Los Angeles area, and attended an emerging service with an acquaintance. Upon the start of my graduate studies I became more familiar with the emerging church and to slake my curiosity about what this new phenomenon was all about, I began casually attending an emerging congregation in the Denver area. The curiosity about what drives these congregations to practice in their unique ways ultimately led me to explore their methods and doctrines in this paper.

The emerging church movement in America challenges normative assumptions of American Evangelical Christian practice. I will be focusing on the emerging church’s response to these evangelical churches rather than mainline or Catholic denominations

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<sup>1</sup> There is often an interchange of the words “emerging” and “Emergent” to describe similar trends in recent American Christian movements. The word “Emergent” typically refers to those who affiliate themselves with [www.emergentvillage.org](http://www.emergentvillage.org), whose founders began the website and cohort in order to spur conversation among those who minister to and belong to the larger emerging church. For purposes of clarity I will use the term “emerging church” to describe the recent phenomenon in American Christianity that will be discussed.

because several defining characteristics of the emerging church mirror the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey's* definition of evangelical protestant Christianity. The survey describes that:

Churches within the evangelical Protestant tradition share certain religious beliefs (such as the conviction that personal acceptance of Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation), practices (such as an emphasis on bringing other people to the faith) and origins (including separatist movements against established religious institutions).<sup>2</sup>

This basic similarity, as well as the fact that evangelical churches hold the largest share of Christians in the US (26.3% of 78.4% total Christians identify as evangelical)<sup>3</sup>, points to evangelical churches as the subject of emerging response. The emerging church's approach toward ministry and church structure embraces the "emerging generation" of Christians and non-Christians, which is widely held to be post-modern in their mindsets and approaches. To describe the demographic of people who range in age from 15-35 (approximately) often referred to as the millennial generation or generation Y, which is subject to the post-modern shift and emerging church ministry, I will use the phrase "emerging generation." Kimball's use of this phrase represents that generation well as they emerge from modernity to post-modernity, and I will use it favor of post-modern, post-Christian or other possible terminology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic*, February 2008, p.13.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Forum, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* February 2008, p.10

<sup>4</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 49.

The shift toward post-modern thought in the emerging generation has prompted a shift in the establishment and practice of evangelical churches in the United States evidenced in the response to top-down hierarchical leadership methods, fundamental interpretation of scripture and theology and corporatized, banal worship services. The post-modern turn toward bottom-up methods is further evidenced by the synchronous evolution of social justice involvement and the emerging generation's deviation away norms of practice in response to changing needs and attitudes.

These repudiations of the standards and norms of church life, and in social improvement efforts serve as a response to the changing tenor of culture and popular thought, as the emerging generation moves away from modern thought toward post-modernity. Throughout the paper I will be using the term "modern church" to represent evangelical Christian churches in the United States that fit the "mega-church" model referred to throughout. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research defines "mega-churches" as having an average weekly attendance of over 2000 and that "Virtually all these megachurches have a conservative theology, even those within mainline denominations."<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of my argument, size is not the main issue, but the methods of practice and ideology that are consistent among large and small churches, that embody the "mega" aesthetic. Therefore I will avoid the "mega" label in reference to the paradigm of American Christianity, and use the broader "modern church" label.

The attitude of the modern church has long been linked with the mindsets of modernity, which value authority, category and reason. The modernist school of thought

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<sup>5</sup> (<http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html> Hartford Institute for Religion Research website, accessed 4/15/2012.)



acts upon presuppositions that truth is founded upon reasoned deductions, and the process of determining truth yields a singular objective outcome. Stanley Grenz asserts that the trappings of modernist thought inherent in modern churches do not meet the needs of postmodern thinkers, such as the emerging generation. He writes:

The postmodern turn is marked by the questioning of these central assumptions of the modern outlook. According to postmoderns, truth is not merely a quality of statements that ascribe properties to the world. Nor should truth be limited to what can be verified by reason and the empirical scientific method alone. Instead, postmoderns are convinced that there are ways of knowing in addition to reason, such as through the emotions and the intuition. And rather than a realm of impersonal laws, postmoderns view the world as historical, relational, personal, and participatory.<sup>6</sup>

The emerging church has taken it upon itself to respond to modernist thinking in the evangelical church and bring about a more holistic version of Christian faith that involves more subjective sensibilities and allows for greater freedom of expression, worship, leadership and doctrinal interpretation than modernist structures allow.

Criticism of the emerging church focuses on the notion that the fluidity of emerging doctrine can be construed as relativistic and having no grounding in objective truth. Proponents of the emerging church argue that they are simply opening up interpretation to allow practitioners to participate in the interpretative process, and reach doctrinal conclusions based on their own understanding of biblical narratives. The multitude of meanings that emerging practice allows for is well suited to the emerging generation, and serves as a more effective tool for religious practice and evangelism.

This is seen similarly in the case of social justice movements undertaken by those in the emerging generation. Within contemporary social justice movements there is a

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley Grenz, "Participating in What Frees: The Concept of Truth in the Postmodern Context," *Review and Expositor* 100 (2003): 688.

shift away from the top-down, mass communicated, authoritative methodologies often relied upon by outreach and relief organizations toward a holistic and bottom-up methodology that allows room for the interpretations of the participant.

My thesis is that while these phenomena are not necessarily intrinsically linked to one another, what I will illustrate in the following pages is there is a great deal of shared ground between the two communities that originates in their deviation from the historical norms of their respective communities. This deviation serves as response to the shift from modernity to post-modernity that is taking place throughout Christianity and culture as a whole, and I will argue that within these movements bottom-up methods serve as a more effective tool for evangelism and involvement than the institutional methods of their forebears because of a distinct focus on experience, participation and narrative not included in prior iterations of the evangelical church. The emphasis on appealing to the demands of the emerging generation and the preference to post-modern thought is key in understanding why this movement is happening, and how it is distinct from the modern church. To determine this we must ask what the emerging church is doing differently, and how it stands out from the modern Evangelical church? Also, what are the needs of the emerging generation in religious practice and social justice involvement, and how do emerging models better meet those needs? In order to address this, let us first focus on the emerging church, and its origins and behaviors that make it distinct from traditional manifestations of evangelical Christianity in America.

## **CHAPTER TWO: EMERGING CHURCH**

The emerging church movement is a response to traditional evangelical Christianity that has developed since the turn of the twenty-first century. There is neither a distinct date of origin, nor a distinct founder of this movement. At the turn of the twenty-first century, several writers, pastors and thinkers began to reorient their focus to emphasize the growing number of churches and individuals that were embodying post-modern Christian thought in their worship and actions. This led to some seminal writers and pastors engaging in what they have simply called a “conversation” about what it means and what it looks like to embody this new kind of Christianity. While the content of this conversation has been fluid between actors, the motivation of each of the actors is consistent. Each experienced a level of dissatisfaction with the way that many churches were acting according to the old model set forward in modernist thought and the way Christians and non-Christians alike were responding to this behavior.

While there is not a distinct point of origin, i.e. Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the church door if you will, there are still a number of seminal writers and pastors that were engaged in dialogue about what they observed in their churches and culture at large. One of these writer/pastors, Brian McLaren, is often considered to be at the forefront of the emerging conversation. His trilogy of fictionalized accounts of coming to an understanding of what post-modern Christianity looks like in the modern world has been influential in describing the tone of how the emerging movement began.

In the first of these books, Daniel, the central character is expressing his own growing disillusionment with the status quo of church life and questions the current modernist structures of evangelical church life. Over the course of many discussions with a new friend, Neo, who has trodden a similar path as him, Daniel discovers that questioning and movement towards a fresh take on Christian faith is not uncommon.

McLaren writes about the uncertainty that comes with questioning the tenets of one's faith, and the structures that it has been built on. Daniel describes his questions and trappings of his dissatisfactions to Neo who describes the shift in thinking he is having. Neo explains to him, "You have a modern faith, a faith you developed in your homeland of modernity. But you're immigrating to a new land, a postmodern world."<sup>7</sup> This story of reorientation to the new landscape of Christianity serves as an apt allegory for the burgeoning population of post-modern Christians and non-Christians alike who have a critical view of modern church structures, and are making efforts to engage in a new way that reflects this shift.

These sentiments are reflected in Kinnaman and Lyon's book *Un-Christian*, which is a compilation of empirical research of emerging generations in order to determine the perceptions associated and held by the 16-29 year old demographic in America. They posit:

In our national surveys we found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are anti-homosexual, judgmental, and hypocritical. These "big three" are followed by the following negative perceptions, embraced by a majority of young adults; old-fashioned, too involved in politics, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, boring, not accepting of other faiths and confusing. When they think of the Christian faith, these are the

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<sup>7</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind Of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 13.

images that come to mind. *This is what a new generation thinks about Christianity* (Emphasis original).<sup>8</sup>

These perceptions are the reality of the emerging generation, and emerging theology concludes that these sentiments are the results of post-modern individuals experiencing a modernist church, which clings to norms of authority, category and objectivity. These normative structures have developed over the course of generations of Christian thought and church history as a result of efforts by the modern church to expand its scope and influence. As the church progressed through the age of reason and adopted the tenets of rationalism and other trappings of modernity, it slowly became the hierarchical and denominationally structured organism that is today interpreted by the emerging generation in a negative light due to the effects of these modern foundations.

In his article discussing correlational theology, Kuess asserts that various individuals within the emerging church have experienced the negative ramifications of these foundations, thus prompting a response. He describes how this re-evaluation follows the crisis experienced by the participants of a community as a transition is made away from the comfort of being the dominant actor in a given paradigm, to experiencing a sudden change in status or praxis. He asserts that at this point, the community goes through a process of reevaluation, eventually coming to watershed moment that merits a new course of action. He writes, “Here the decision is often made whether to find new possibilities and interpretations from within the tradition, or to break with the past and

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<sup>8</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 27.

look for answers outside of traditional boundaries.”<sup>9</sup> The decision to break with norms of evangelical church life is the choice that brought the emerging church to its gestation and early formation.

As previously mentioned, there is no single actor in the in the origination of the emerging church, but several seminal figures whose writing and innovations in their own churches gave voice to the movement. These figures experienced the crisis and responded accordingly to meet the needs of their congregations. Organized evangelical Christianity in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century emphasized tradition, establishment and moral categorization, finding its pinnacle in the grandiose “mega-church” aesthetic that embraced high attendance numbers and levels of bureaucracy not previously held to be markers of success in American church life. The crisis of the emergents was formed out of this situation, when the indicators of a successful church did not match the theological perspectives of those who inhabited that realm.

Carl Raschke describes this growing dissatisfaction with the status quo of American church life. Regarding the over-the-top aesthetic of mega-ministries of the twentieth century, he writes:

The present emerging church movement was a delayed reaction to these 1980ish styles of mega-evangelicalism, but its causes were also quite similar. The postmodernizing of world Christianity had its precursors in the demodernizing of American religion, which can be seen as sort of nativist spiritual revolt of the post-war generation against a highly rationalized and bureaucratic Protestantism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jeff Kuess, “The Emergent Church and Neo-Correlational Theology After Tillich, Schleiermacher and Browning” *SJT* 61(4): 450–461 (2008), 460.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Raschke, *GloboChrist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 39.

This response to a crisis, inspired emerging leaders to oppose the standards and norms of American evangelicalism, and to approach church praxis in a manner that reflects postmodern, emerging sensibilities that allow for greater freedom of experience, participation and interpretation.

The environment, behaviors and ideologies of emerging congregations oppose that of conventional church life almost diametrically. Pastor and writer Dan Kimball writes, “The word post-modern represents a change in worldview moving from the values and beliefs of the modern era to the new post-modern era, which rejects many modern values and beliefs.”<sup>11</sup> He asserts that this is true of church life and doctrine as well, and the manifestation of the emerging church’s response is the best illustration of this. Emerging congregations utilize space, community, media, words and activities in a manner that is often described as holistic, believing that all senses are involved in the worship experience. They develop spaces in a communal and intentional manner in order to cultivate an atmosphere that all senses are active and worship is experienced in a variety of ways, allowing each individual to form interpretation according to their experiences. The preaching, setting and involvement of congregants in regards to the worship setting is often unorthodox compared to traditional standards. The shift toward decentralized practice is illustrated in the movements that favor new components and styles in the worship service. Couches and candles replace pews and fluorescents, a speaker standing immersed or at the same level as the audience replaces lecterns and stages, a rented church basement or pub may replace a typical brick and mortar church

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<sup>11</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 49.

sanctuary, and multimedia presentations, artistic displays and experiential participant oriented practices are used rather than traditional presentation and preaching styles.

The tendency toward the experiential is a tenant of the post-modern worship service, and is best described by those who put it into practice. The mission statement and descriptions of services for many churches are available on their websites, and I have chosen two that embody the experiential sentiment. I have selected for this demonstration an emerging church at the local level here in Denver , as well as one that has received particular attention in emerging circles nationally. The first is from Bloom Church in Denver. This church meets weekly in small house church groups throughout the metropolitan area, and meets once a week as a whole for a larger worship gathering. They describe the larger gathering as such:

When you come to a Bloom gathering (we meet in the basement of First Baptist), you'll probably feel a bit like you walked into a living room. That's intentional. We're not trying to manufacture a mega-cool event. We're trying to create a space where we can encounter God and each other in 'the beauty of holiness.' Our gatherings are sacred yet lighthearted times where we are formed together by and for God.<sup>12</sup>

In my visits to this church, I have observed the worship setting as being an intimate time that embraces openness of interpretation and expression during worship. In a similar thread, the church that Dan Kimball works at, Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, California has embraced a similar tone in their worship gatherings to create a space where one's experiences and feelings form a more robust version of their interpretation based on what is seen and felt during worship. Their website offers:

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<sup>12</sup> Bloom Church, "About our gatherings" Bloom Church website, <http://bloomchurchdenver.com/#/gatherings/about-our-gatherings> (accessed on 4/1/2012).



We believe that God created us in His image and that God's creativity should be reflected in the church. We are passionate about expressing our faith and communicating the Scriptures through creative means. Art, music, poetry, photography, dance, and acting are all encouraged and in the fabric of the church's worship expression (Genesis 1, Exodus 31:3-4).<sup>13</sup>

This embrace of creativity and the unexpected is indicative of the move toward an experience in worship that allows for a multitude of meanings from a shared source, and seeks to let participants form their own interpretations of God, scripture and theology through those experiences.

The meeting style or worship service reflects a shift toward the transcendent or spiritual, and away from the formal and dogmatic atmosphere of many modern churches, allowing for an individualized interpretation and experience of God within that setting. While the experiential components of worship services are integral to an embrace of postmodern praxis, this is not to say that the only differences in an emerging church are aesthetic, or related to the worship setting. Kimball warns against focusing only on worship services as an indicator of emerging churches. He writes, “Rethinking the emerging church involves rethinking almost *everything* we do. The worship service is but one part of it”(emphasis original).<sup>14</sup> The underpinnings of emerging theology are set upon foundations that reach much further into the shift from modern to postmodern than just a change in worship styling or aesthetics.

A complicating aspect in defining the emerging church is that there is no singular shared theology, and broadly speaking, that tendency toward decentralization is a

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<sup>13</sup> Vintage Faith Church, “Vintage Faith has The Arts and Creativity in Its Blood,” Vintage Faith Church website, <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision/arts> (accessed on 4/1/2012).

<sup>14</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 37.

defining characteristic of the emerging church. In his brief article describing changing trends in American Christianity, Tony Jones writes,

Emergent Christianity is hard to pin down because it is fluid, and has not developed along the bureaucratic lines of denominationalism but within the open source structures of the Internet. There is no ideology, except maybe an ideology that gives no quarters to ideologies.<sup>15</sup>

This apparent disavowal of centralization and systematization is key to what makes an emerging theology distinct from its modernist forebears. Where there was once a desire to control authority of interpretation for sake of institutional growth and solidarity, the emerging church puts interpretation and revelation in the hands and minds of everyone involved. This allows the church to maintain a holistic emphasis for each participant to render their own interpretations and ideas, rather than keeping power of authority and interpretation in the hands of the few to be spread top-down. Pettegrew describes that, “In hermeneutics, postmodernists believe that the text of a work itself does not contain meaning, but the meaning is instead supplied by the reader. Thus for Scripture, what the author meant when he wrote the text is irrelevant to the interpretation of the text.”<sup>16</sup> The plurality inherent in post-modern readings of scripture is seen a positive to emerging practitioners, but critics view this notion as relativism with little grounding in tradition and truth. Emerging church proponents don’t view openness to differing interpretations as a hazard, but welcome the opportunity to have discourse.

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Jones, “The Emergent Church: Christianity in America is Changing,” *Tikkun* 23,3: (May/June 2008): 11.

<sup>16</sup> Larry D. Pettegrew, “Evangelicalism, Paradigms and the Emerging Church,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 17 (Fall 2006): 164.

In his book *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, John Caputo discusses the manner in which a singular definition or interpretation of the divine becomes risky for the Christian practitioner. He writes:

The path to God is also a counterpath, where a great 'not' inscribes a zone of absolute respect around 'God', meaning, among other things, that we should be very cautious about pronouncing what 'God' is or means lest we find ourselves falling down before an idol.<sup>17</sup>

In allowing for various interpretations and experiences, post-modern approaches to Christian theology prevent authority and power from being maintained in a single locus, and the emerging movement has embraced this notion as a means to allow for subjective or individualized experience and practice. This movement towards open interpretation and meanings pushes the emerging conversation further and allows for differing views to have equal claim to authority and relevance, thus fueling discussion.

While the shift toward open interpretation deviates from fundamentalist views of scriptural authority and traditional methods of interpretation standardized in modern evangelical churches, post-modern audiences welcome the opportunity to participate in narratives themselves. This can be construed as a relativistic venture that permits any conclusion to be drawn from scriptural interpretation regardless of any conflict it may have with Christian tradition. James Bielo however writes:

The stress on 'beliefs' and 'facts' that dominates systematic theology is replaced with an emphasis on the moral and metaphysical truths that permeate scripture. Emerging Christians stress Biblical authority just as conservative Evangelicals do, but construe a different relationship to that authority. This creates a new space for mystery. Systematic theology prioritizes God's immanence and the revelation and knowability of the divine nature and plan. Narrative theology shifts the attention

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<sup>17</sup> John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 54.

to divine transcendence and the unavoidably partial ability of humans to understand God's gracious schemes. In turn, the necessity of unfailing certainty in matters of faith disappears. Doubt and mystery become productive, beneficial places to dwell, not dangers to guard against.<sup>18</sup>

To the modern church controlled interpretation of scripture and systematic theologies have secured authority for church leadership, and tradition serves as a check and balance to control that interpretive authority. The emerging church rather views scripture as a narrative, with transcendent moral lessons within it that guard it against perversions unreflective of Christ's teachings, but allow for the participant to still experience the narrative based on their own context.

With many different voices espousing their own interpretations of scripture and theological conclusions, a constant voice within the emerging church is difficult to pin down. As previously mentioned this fluidity is welcomed as to further discussion, but is criticized as ignoring systematic theological concepts. Scot McKnight describes emerging Christian's skepticism of systematic theologies. He describes that with so many voices declaring their own certainty of absolute truth, the discussion has become mired in disagreement that only evidences the elusiveness of divine understanding. He instead asserts that the narrative quality of scripture prompts further discussion in search of divine understanding. He writes:

Hence, a trademark feature of the emerging movement is that we believe all theology will remain a conversation about the Truth who is God in Christ through the Spirit, and about God's story of redemption at work in the church. No systematic theology can be final.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James S. Bielo, "The Emerging Church in America: Notes on the Interaction of Christianities," *Religion* 39 (2009): 222.

<sup>19</sup> Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today* (Feb 2007): 38.

The plurality of interpretations and conclusions drawn by emerging Christians therefore ultimately brings a better understanding and examination of divine truth through the conversation brought on by differing views.

While there is an abundance of opportunities for different interpretations among those in the emerging community, there are several critical components that shouldn't be overlooked. The most pivotal of these is the importance of early Christian tradition and history to the emerging movement. To the emerging movement, the centrality of Christ to the church is non-negotiable. It is what inspires and compels the church to act in the world, and their experiences of the divine are foundational for them. Reliance on biblical narrative and theological tradition is indispensable. This, however, does not exclude a church from experiencing or interpreting Christ in differing manners. Caputo frames the need to allow differing views and versions of the same constant well when he writes "That requires the ability to imagine ourselves otherwise and hence concede that while we rest firmly on the rock of ages, different ages rest on different rocks."<sup>20</sup> That allowance and respect of conclusions derived from whatever means leads to a greater depth of understanding and conversation for the Christian community as a whole.

When different voices have a place at the same table, it allows for growth of individual Christians and churches within the greater realm of Christianity. Peter Rollins asserts that the ability for any person or church to have power and authority in interpretation and revelation is a powerful tool allowing for the proliferation of the

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<sup>20</sup> Caputo, *Deconstruct*, 41.

Christian faith as a whole. He writes regarding his concept of a/theology, the decentralizing of authority, in describing the sense that no one has it wrong or right:

This emerging a/theology can thus be described as a genuinely ecumenical device, for by unsettling and de-centering any idea of a one true interpretation held by one group over and against all the others, a network of bridges is formed between different interpretive communities who acknowledge that we are all engaged in an interpretive process that can never do justice to revelation itself.<sup>21</sup>

This community of differing interpretations in conversation with one another is what the emerging church employs to spread the message of Christianity, and to embrace the world around them. This sensibility of individual interpretation is key to the incarnational, bottom-up methodology that the emerging church embraces as a means to evangelism and lifestyle, to be focused on in the next section.

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Rollins, *How (Not) To Speak of God* (London: Paraclete Press, 2006), 33.

### **CHAPTER THREE: INCARNATIONAL METHODOLOGY**

Christianity has historically emphasized proselytism and evangelization. This reflects the gospel mandate from Christ, to “go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). This is known as the great commission and has led to a tradition of outward ministry efforts to the outside world, and has taken many forms throughout history. The emerging church has equally taken on this challenge, though in a manner that embraces their unique position as a postmodern actor in a modern world, utilizing the experiential aesthetic that is seen in their worship and theology. This is a marked contrast to modern evangelical norms that the emerging church is responding to, which favor top-down, mass communication-based methodologies that lie within the existing power structure.

The standards of ministry and evangelization that modern Evangelical churches have incorporated into their repertoire have been developed within a modern system that embraces foundations of concrete authority and category in the incorporation and methodology of church structures. In his book *They Like Jesus But Not The Church*, Dan Kimball examines the perspectives and perceptions of the emerging generation from outside the Christian subculture. He focuses on several aspects of modern church structures that dissuade or repel emerging generations from the church, the first of which is the notion that the church is overly concerned with power and top-heavy

denominational organization. In his research and interviews, he finds that the overwhelming impression of church practice is that it is overly concerned with power, authority and hierarchy. He asserts:

In the 1980's, churches began applying business principles to the church. Pastors and leaders began using some of the language and metaphors of the business world, including adding business descriptions to our titles, such as executive pastor, senior pastor, chief financial officer, executive assistant to the senior pastor, the elder board, management team and others.<sup>22</sup>

This movement towards stricter, more rigid definitions of organization and hierarchy provoked the dissatisfaction that postmodern emerging generations reject in the status quo of church life.

This sentiment toward established religion is reflected in the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's survey on the US religious landscape. Their research demonstrates a movement from religious affiliations toward non-affiliation. They report that in addition to the overall national trend toward growth in non-affiliation that:

Another group that shows a net gain is nondenominational protestants, whose share of the population has more than tripled as a result of changes in affiliation; 1.5% of the population was raised within nondenominational Protestantism, compared with 4.5% who currently report such an affiliation.<sup>23</sup>

The American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS) also confirms this tendency away from denominational structures in their 2008 report. The study describes the movement away from mainline denominations evidenced in their research in stating "Much of this decline in Mainline identification is due to the growing public preference for the generic

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<sup>22</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 79-80.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy Miller, ed., *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "US Religious Landscape Survey 2008"* Accessed on Pew Forum website, 4/8/2012.

<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, 23.



‘Christian’ response and the recent popularity of the ‘non-denominational Christian’ response. Fewer than 200,000 people favored this term in 1990 but in 2008 it accounts for over eight million Americans.”<sup>24</sup> The movement away from denominational structures and affiliations as a whole supports the perception that as emerging generations encounter religious institutions, they are met with religious bodies that incorporate themselves along rigid business-like models, that embrace hierarchical formats that recent emerging generations find unattractive in a spiritual outlet.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and up to the present, many influential, large-scale churches in the United States continue to adopt models that utilize strict definitions of leadership and ministry in their services and structures, which has in turn been reflected in their modes of ministry and outreach. These ministry and methodology techniques are often rigid and dogmatic steps to salvation or membership that do not allow for the important experiential component of faith that is increasingly crucial to emerging theology. William Abraham discusses this approach in his article on the theology of evangelism, and argues that in the evolution of evangelization methodologies, norms of evangelism have become largely standardized to utilize a system of mass communication and verbal proclamation. He posits:

Most ‘up-front’ methods of evangelizing assume that the person will make a sudden decision to follow Christ. They may be asked to indicate this by raising a hand, making their confession, taking a booklet or whatever is the preferred method of the evangelist. The fact is that most people come to God more gradually.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, “America Religious Identity Survey Summary Report” (Hartford, CT: Trinity College, 2009), 6.

<sup>25</sup> William J. Abraham, “A Theology of Evangelism” *Interpretation* 48 (2) (1994): 21.

These regimented methods ignore the experiential component of spirituality that emerging generations find necessary for a religious experience and do not allow the practitioner to gain initiation or exposure in an effective manner. To demonstrate this, I have highlighted excerpts from the websites of some large, mega-stylized churches in the United States to illustrate the tone of modern ministry and outreach that emerging generations perceive as inauthentic or ineffective.

*Outreach Magazine*, a Christian publication specializing in church growth, leadership techniques and methods publishes an annual list of the 100 largest churches, as well as fastest growing churches in the United States. In order to again demonstrate the trends of a certain style of church, I have selected one church that is on the local level in the Denver metro area, and one that has gained greater national attention. I have selected the number one church on Outreach's list, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas and number forty-one, Flatirons Community Church in Lafayette, Colorado.<sup>26</sup> Each of these churches has attendance numbers in the thousands, and evangelizes through multiple ministries, outreach efforts and advertised campaigns to attract more members.

Lakewood Church in Houston is led by Pastor Joel Osteen, a nationally known television evangelist and Christian author who has been in leadership at Lakewood since 1999, since the death of his Father and predecessor. Lakewood was begun in Houston in 1959, and has seen enormous growth to its current attendance level of over forty thousand, which requires the church to meet in a converted sports arena. The church's

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<sup>26</sup> Outreach Magazine, "Outreach's 100 Largest and Fastest Growing Churches in America 2011" Outreach magazine Website, <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/magazine/recent-issues/4317-The-2011-Outreach-100.html>, Accessed electronically on 4/7/2012.

main website lists no less than seventeen distinct ministry initiatives, and advertises drive-up prayer services and listings for its worship services on several national and local television networks.<sup>27</sup> These efforts have been effective in propelling the church to “mega” proportions, and pushing it into the spotlight of Christianity on the national level.

Likewise, Flatirons Community Church, which meets in Lafayette, Colorado, embraces a similar “mega” aesthetic in its worship services and outreach efforts. Flatirons, which reports attendance levels of approximately 10,000 attendees per week, meets in a converted 4000 seat shopping center, in the Denver suburb of Lafayette.<sup>28</sup> The church’s website lists twelve ministry programs that service men, women, children, couples and college aged persons among others. Along with these ministry programs, they list thirteen recurring workshops and events held throughout the week, while also offering recordings and podcasts of their services. The leadership of the church uses titles such as lead pastor, executive pastor, chief financial officer and executive liaison, reflecting the business like structure of leadership.<sup>29</sup> Flatiron’s services reflect the seeker-sensitive model, which utilizes popular culture references and music in their worship settings, and widespread outreach programs, which attract many visitors and members weekly. While these seeker-sensitive initiatives used as one of many ministry apparatus are effective in garnering more visitors to services and do not preclude a church from

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<sup>27</sup> Lakewood Church, “Home Page,” Lakewood Church website, <http://www.lakewood.cc/Pages/Home.aspx>, accessed on 4/7/2012.

<sup>28</sup> John Aguilar, “Flatirons Community Church: Bringing the Faithful to Lafayette's Abandoned Big Boxes,” Boulder Daily Camera, 4/9/11, [http://www.dailycamera.com/ci\\_17804983](http://www.dailycamera.com/ci_17804983), accessed 4/7/2012.

<sup>29</sup> Flatirons Community Church, “Home Page” Flatirons Community Church Website, <http://www.flatironschurch.com/>, accessed on 4/7/2012.

having an effective Christian ministry or foundation, they are not necessarily effective in communicating to or attracting postmodern, emerging generations to their services.

These “mega” style churches have adopted standards of success and growth that reflect Kimball’s assertion that business culture is seeping into church culture. In their book *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Van Gelder and Zscheile assert that the indicators of evangelistic success and effectiveness are largely based on empirical, data driven criteria. They write:

In the eyes of many church leaders and denominational or judicatory systems, what matters is attendance at worship, dollars in the offering plate, the number of people coming to church programs and the size of the church’s organizational footprint (including real estate).<sup>30</sup>

The combination of these emphases has resulted in the seeker-sensitive technique of programming that is manifest in large advertised outreach campaigns, sundry ministries to appeal to niche markets, and large scale church campuses and corporations that often end up using these elements as tools to grow their populations and influence to a greater level. This manner of evangelization often neglects the experiential, authentic, relational and holistic mentality toward spirituality that the emerging generation seeks out in church life and associations, and has spurred emerging churches to approach evangelism such that these needs are met.

The emerging model of church outreach and evangelization takes a form that caters to the experience-driven postmodern generation. In his work *Culture and Everyday Life*, Andy Bennett describes that “The postmodern self is one which operates free of the

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<sup>30</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 154.

structurally grounded restrictions that held sway in modern society, the latter imposing limits and constraints on individual expressions on identity.”<sup>31</sup> This rings especially true in the case of religious interpretation and the personal expressions of religious devotion formed thereafter. The old models of ministry have been shown not to have the same effectiveness for the emerging generations as they did for modern generations. In the case of the emerging church, the standards and norms of modern churches have been superseded by methodologies that allow for the experiential element favored by emerging generations to gain traction in emerging churches. The experiential component allows for fluidity in gaining experiences that form one’s identity in the manner discussed by Bennett, and operates as an effective mechanism in emerging church evangelism. The informal and experiential mood that permeates emerging worship services and theologies has distinctly manifested in the “incarnational” methodologies of outreach and evangelization of emerging church participants.

These methodologies favor bottom-up and holistic approaches toward proselytism and evangelization that are emphasized in relational and missional attitudes best described as “incarnational” in their implementation. This movement toward an incarnational approach in emerging practice grows out of a response to the top down, mass communicated methods that have been experienced in modern churches and interpreted as ineffective and inauthentic. William Abraham contends that ministry models ought to adapt to this shift. He writes:

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<sup>31</sup> Andy Bennett, *Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 40.

In my judgment, it is imperative that we enrich our conception of evangelism to the point where we move beyond mere proclamation to include within it the initial grounding of all believers in the kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup>

The movement toward a relational, incarnational ministry is indispensable in the methodology of emerging churches.

Incarnational ministry is a term that describes a transcendent form of evangelization that takes place in the space of everyday relationships. In his recent *Atlantic* article describing the emerging church Josh Kron describes this manner of evangelism succinctly. He writes:

The Emerging Church preaches, in its uniquely deconstructionist way, what it claims is Jesus Christ's original, true message, seemingly lost long ago: that God lives in each person, that the Kingdom of Heaven is here on Earth now, and that faith is not belief but an action and spiritual state of being to be experienced creatively, through human relationships, and by raising questions.<sup>33</sup>

Incarnational ministry or outreach is characterized by a practitioner carrying out their everyday actions in a manner that is representative of the teachings and behaviors of Jesus Christ and the Gospel writings in their relationships, ranging from casual interactions to deeper friendships. The incarnational approach manifests itself in earnest, honest conversations, exchanges and relationships with all people inside or outside of

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<sup>32</sup> Abraham, *Theology of Evangelism*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Josh Kron, "Mission From God: The Upstart Christian Sect Driving Invisible Children and Changing Africa," *The Atlantic*, 4/10/2012.

[http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/04/mission-from-god-the-upstart-christian-sect-driving-invisible-children-and-changing-africa/255626/2/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/04/mission-from-god-the-upstart-christian-sect-driving-invisible-children-and-changing-africa/255626/2/?single_page=true), accessed on 4/12/2012.

conventional church life. In his commentary to the eighth chapter of Kinnaman and Lyon's *UnChristian*, Christian activist Mike Foster describes that Jesus:

Hung with the not so perfect people of the world and showed them what Christianity was all about. He was never concerned about a person's title, society's name tag or the sign on their place of work.<sup>34</sup>

The attitude of Christ that approaches and interacts with all people is at the core of incarnational methodology, every relationship serves as a vessel for evangelization at the most intangible level. This behavior operates under the supposition that through one's authentic relationships with non-Christians, a practitioner who is emblematic of the Christian virtues of love, grace and patience as exemplified in the Christian gospel writings will serve as sufficient testimony toward the Christian faith to act as an evangelizing agent, without utilizing traditional evangelization techniques. The authenticity inherent in these relationships allows for exposure and conversation to take place between believers and non-believers in the context of a fully formed relationship.

The emphasis on authenticity in relationships is crucial for the emerging generation, which is wary of inauthentic proselytism that has been experienced through modern churches and Christians. McLaren points this out in *A New Kind of Christian*, when the main character uses the phrase "friendship evangelism" to describe the relationship his friend Neo has with a non-Christian. Neo responds to him "Pardon me Daniel, but I am not too fond of that expression, 'friendship evangelism.' It can prostitute friendship, which in my mind invalidates the evangelism."<sup>35</sup> Just as McLaren's postmodern character rejects what he perceives as an inauthentic ploy towards

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<sup>34</sup> Mike Foster in Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 203.

<sup>35</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 104.

proselytism, emerging generations reject evangelistic advances that are read with an underlying motive. The emerging generation places heavy emphasis on the experiential, and misuse of what could be a rich experience denigrates it and negates what effect they might have had. Rather, the mindset of incarnational ministry is that when one engages in it, it becomes a lifestyle orientation rather than a mechanism that can be deployed on a per case basis. Kimball contends that in assuming this lifestyle posture one becomes holistically seeker-sensitive, rather than just using seeker-sensitive programming as lure for church attendance. He writes:

Being seeker-sensitive as a lifestyle means that we are sensitive to spiritual seekers in all that we do. This can apply to our conversations with those seeking; it can apply to how we design any style of worship service. In this sense, it is not a style or methodology of worship; it is a lifestyle approach to how we live as Christians in relation to being sensitive to seekers of faith.<sup>36</sup>

It is not just that one becomes more stereotypically Christian around non-Christians, or emphasizes a certain facet of their personality to bring out a desired result in a relationship, one forms their personality and behavior to the model set by biblical accounts of Christ's teachings and behaviors in all of their interactions with others. Maintaining this sense of lifestyle orientation serves as more than a mere methodological trick that facilitates conversion. To the religious practitioner it creates an event where the divine emerges in relationship in order to bring about revelation through that experience.

In regards to ministerial and evangelical theology, the incarnational model functions as more than just a tool to allow for proselytism between parties. Kok and Niemandt assert that the relational bonds formed between people are crucial to dialogue

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<sup>36</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 25.



and communication, but there is level of divine interaction at work in the equation. They write regarding church wide efforts “Such a church is missional by intent, where daily life is seen as an expression of the sent-ness by God into this world.”<sup>37</sup> There is a belief for the practitioner of incarnational ministry that the divine is at work through the relationships formed, and revelation occurs in these relationships. The actions of the divine in this interchange are what form the etymology of the incarnational label. The divine acts incarnate through human agents to reveal itself and let interpretations form from that experience. Raschke describes

In short, the mystery of the incarnation is constantly unfurling in the body of believers who affirm the message of the gospel, which is not a verbal content so much as it is the embodiment of love in active relationship, of ‘being Jesus’ to others.<sup>38</sup>

The incarnational model allows for a holistic sensibility regarding Christian practice. The practitioner becomes the minister and acts as a medium for divine revelation through their experience with others, and lets spiritual development emerge from that point, from one person to another rather than on a public or corporate level.

This interplay of the sacred and divine being delivered through the mundane vessel of an everyday relationship with an ordinary person is an appealing and effective ministerial outlook for the emerging generation that looks toward experiences to form their interpretations of spirituality. For the postmodern Christian or seeker of spirituality, a forcefully presented message of religious doctrine through standardized, mass

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<sup>37</sup>Jacobus Kok and Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, “(Re)discovering a Missional-Incarnational Ethos”, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 65-1 (2009): 507.

<sup>38</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 64.

communicated means does not have the same efficacy that it once did. Subjective interpretations based on observations, experiences and feelings inform the bulk spiritual formation. Rollins writes regarding the apostle Paul's approachable, open-ended rhetorical style:

Unlike the traditional mode of preaching, which seeks to persuade and clarify, this discourse maintains the object of communication as obscure and unobjectifiable. Instead of closing thought down – by telling people what they ought think – this discourse opens up thought.<sup>39</sup>

The intuitive nature of discovery through examination of experiences is what drives the participants in the emerging church to evangelize and communicate through the means of relationships and the divine mediation that occurs within those relationships. It is also through the experiences of modeling Jesus' teaching and actions that the participant encounters the stimulus to serve and help others, which will be explored in gaining an understanding of the Christian social justice movement, and how it is similarly experiencing its own emergence from the modern norms that it has long been anchored in.

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<sup>39</sup> Rollins, *How (Not) To Speak of God*, 38.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS AND IDEOLOGIES**

This third component of the paper focuses on the ideologies that social justice movements are formed around and offers a description of the methods employed in established organizations. Several defining aspects characterize these established social justice organizations that have their origins in modern Christianity. The description of these characteristics will serve as a point of comparison for the emerging social justice movements in the fourth section.

Social justice refers to the humanitarian efforts that take place in order to provide equality and relief to those afflicted by poverty, economic suffering and issues of human rights. These processes have been undertaken by a litany of actors, with just as many motivations for countless years, all for the reason of providing a level of equality and dignity for humankind through charitable mediums. This examination will focus itself on those organizations and actors whose motivations and ideologies align themselves with a Christian worldview and either incorporate themselves with an emphasis on Christian doctrine, or as individuals acting according to their own Christian faith.

Christian scriptures provide the foundations for the doctrines that these social justice agents use to inform their actions. From Old Testament law and prophetic writings to the New Testament gospel accounts and epistles, this scriptural charge toward helping those in need is resonated in several passages in particular. We see this evident in the order to protect the alien, the orphan and widow in Exodus 22:21-23, the call to be just

and merciful in Micah 6:8, both the notion that those who strive for righteousness, mercy and peace will be blessed and the call to love a neighbor as the self in Matthew 5:6-9 and 22:39, and the directive that good works are imperative to Christian faith found in James 2:14-24. These passages provide ample precedent for the Christian practitioner to involve themselves in matters that alleviate suffering and provide an equal stake to dignity for all people.

In elaborating on this biblical mandate for justice, Burghardt explains the relational quality of the divine to the human, and within humanity. He posits that by following these various, but consistent calls, the practitioner is in a right relationship with the divine, and that efforts at social justice confirm this right relationship. He writes: “It is a reminder of the moment when God declared all of creation ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31), because simply everything was in right order, in proper relation: humanity (*adam*) to God, humans among themselves, human and nonhuman reality toward one another.”<sup>40</sup> These theological claims make it incumbent upon the Christian practitioner to behave in a manner that ensures respect and care of the other in order to be obedient to God. Labberton furthers this argument in saying “But justice and mercy are not just add-ons to worship, nor are they consequences of worship. Justice and mercy are intrinsic to God, and therefore intrinsic to the worship of God.”<sup>41</sup> These efforts to aid those in need and maintain equality and fairness between humans conform to a divine imperative set forth in Christian tradition that has been interpreted in efforts undertaken to ensure that

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Burghardt, *Justice: A Global Adventure* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, (2004), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 38.

standards of human dignity and equal opportunity are extended to all people in the world. These standards of dignity and equality range from extending legal justice to those who cannot normally attain it, to providing clean water to a community. Social justice is concerned with justice in the restorative sense, where each human being has an inherent right to life, health and freedom from unwarranted persecution.

To provide a context for how these endeavors are undertaken in a tangible sense, I will provide several examples of organizations established under Christian principles of justice that have significant histories as actors in the realm of social justice. The term social justice is varied and diverse, and the efforts that are undertaken in regard to better humanity are equally varied in scope. I will be focusing on three organizations that are concerned with the economic, physical and legal well being of people all over the world. These organizations include an emphasis on Christian imperatives for justice in their mission statements that illustrates their alignment with Christian doctrines of justice, which they pursue through their various endeavors.

These three organizations serve to represent conventional methods and attitudes of social justice. These three organizations make use of hierarchical structures, use fundamentalist interpretations of scripture to form their mission, and communicate their aims through broad methods that do not take the participatory preferences of the emerging generation into account. These organizations act as effective agents to help those in need, and use their size and influence to achieve their earnest goals. I have included these descriptions to provide a context for what emerging social justice models are responding to, and what they prefer in social justice involvement.

The Salvation Army is a Christian outreach and non-profit service organization that has maintains efforts in the United States and abroad. They define themselves in their mission statement, as:

The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.<sup>42</sup>

The Salvation Army pursues these goals through a system of charitable programs ranging from community involved music ministries to international disaster relief. The Salvation Army finds its roots in the evangelism of William Booth in 1850's London where he became a prominent preacher. His preaching messages gained traction in the streets where he focused his efforts toward the homeless and destitute. This emphasis evolved into programs that served the physical needs of the poor as the Salvation Army's scope became international. As they continued to grow in the United States and abroad they incorporated further relief efforts into their repertoire.

The Salvation Army website lists that over 30 million people received some form of aid from them in 2008.<sup>43</sup> The impetus for this service is drawn from biblical precedents to serve and care for those in need and to pursue equality and justice for those people. Their position statement regarding economic justice states, "We believe in the sacred freedom and dignity of persons and are committed to the redemption of the world in all

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<sup>42</sup> The Salvation Army, "Home Page", The Salvation Army website, [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www\\_usn\\_2.nsf/vw-local/About-us](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/vw-local/About-us), accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>43</sup> The Salvation Army, "Programs", The Salvation Army website, [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www\\_usn\\_2.nsf/vw-local/Programs](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/vw-local/Programs), accessed on 4/15/2012.

its dimensions (physical, spiritual, social, economic and political).”<sup>44</sup> This outreach manifests itself in homeless outreach, youth opportunity camps, disaster aid, adult rehabilitation centers and the ubiquitous donation and thrift centers throughout the United States. These services are operated by a system of employees and volunteers who term themselves “soldiers” in the Salvation Army and organize themselves along a military styled hierarchy. Active service in this system require signing an “Articles of War” and following a code of conduct that requires participation in Salvation Army events and meetings and abstaining from substance use.<sup>45</sup> The doctrinal establishment of the Salvation Army is a primary component of its enterprises, and informs how its members affiliate and behave.

WorldVision defines itself as “A Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.”<sup>46</sup> WorldVision was started by Bob Pierce, a former war correspondent who became concerned with well being of children in China following a visit there in 1947. In 1950, after sponsoring a child in China through a local missionary, he implemented the model of monetary child

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<sup>44</sup> The Salvation Army, “Position Statements”, The Salvation Army website, [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www\\_usn\\_2.nsf/vw-dynamic-arrays/B6F3F4DF3150F5B585257434004C177D?openDocument&charset=utf-8](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/vw-dynamic-arrays/B6F3F4DF3150F5B585257434004C177D?openDocument&charset=utf-8), accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>45</sup> The Salvation Army, “Salvation and Service”, The Salvation Army website, [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www\\_usn\\_2.nsf/vw-dynamic-arrays/7100A2893080C5238025732500315746?openDocument&charset=utf-8](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/vw-dynamic-arrays/7100A2893080C5238025732500315746?openDocument&charset=utf-8), accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>46</sup> WorldVision, “Who We Are”, WorldVision website, [http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/about/who-we-are?open&lpos=top\\_drp\\_AboutUs\\_WhoWeAre](http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/about/who-we-are?open&lpos=top_drp_AboutUs_WhoWeAre), accessed on 4/15/2012.

sponsorship in Korea and later in other Asian countries. In the following decades WorldVision developed into a larger project with outreach efforts extending around the globe. They have now branched out to include services that assist communities in developing sustainable and healthy practices to secure long lasting well-being. These practices include initiating clean water projects, providing healthcare for those in need, agriculture and environmental education, hunger alleviation, disaster relief, HIV/AIDS care and the long standing child sponsorship program.<sup>47</sup>

WorldVision's programs are supported by a extensive base of support on the local, national and international level that includes churches in America and abroad as well as other public and private funding from individuals, businesses and public grants. Their website list over 1 billion dollars in donations for the 2011 fiscal year and describes their donor base as such that:

In 2011, our effective work was supported by nearly one million individual donors, thousands of churches and businesses, and hundreds of foundations, organizations, and government agencies around the world. Those include: U.S. Agency for International Development, Microsoft, Proctor & Gamble and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.<sup>48</sup>

This large base of financial support as well as the volunteer support that WorldVision enjoys cements their position as major player in the realm of Christian social justice organizations.

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<sup>47</sup> WorldVision, "WorldVision Around the World: WorldVision website, [http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/ow-home?open&lpos=top\\_drp\\_OurWork](http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/ow-home?open&lpos=top_drp_OurWork), accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>48</sup> WorldVision, "WorldVision at a Glance", WorldVision website, <http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/about/press-FAQs?open&lid=A-W-V-glance&lpos=main>, accessed on 4/15/2012.



The International Justice Mission (IJM) is a non-profit, human rights advocacy group that operates through legal systems to bring those who suffer in forms of slavery, sexual exploitation and oppression to freedom, as motivated by their Christian and biblical understandings of justice. Their website lists that:

In the tradition of heroic Christian leaders like abolitionist William Wilberforce and transformational leaders like Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King, Jr., IJM's staff stand against violent oppression in response to the Bible's call to justice (Isaiah 1:17): *Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow*. IJM seeks to restore to victims of oppression the things that God intends for them: their lives, their liberty, their dignity, the fruits of their labor. By defending and protecting individual human rights, IJM seeks to engender hope and transformation for those it serves and restore a witness of courage in places of oppressive violence. IJM helps victims of oppression regardless of their religion, ethnicity, or gender.<sup>49</sup>

IJM founding member and CEO Gary Haugen served as an investigator in the 1994 Rwanda genocides under the US Department of Justice, and following that experience worked with a group of other lawyers, human rights officials and public figures to combat the systems of injustice in the world that they felt lacked attention in regards to human rights advocacy.

The work of IJM is conducted by legal professionals in the United States and at local level where work is done in order to further IJM's aims of justice for the oppressed. They utilize a model of partnering with local legal authorities, justice systems and qualified investigators to see that those who are oppressed by systems of control and power are able to have their rights restored. They list their goals as being victim relief,

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<sup>49</sup> International Justice Mission, "Who We Are", IJM website, <http://www.ijm.org/who-we-are>, accessed on 4/15/2012.

perpetrator accountability, survivor aftercare and structural transformation.<sup>50</sup> IJM's use of legal knowledge, local contacts and donor support in excess of 24 million in fiscal year 2010<sup>51</sup> have led to its prominence as an actor on the world stage regarding international relief, including its recognition as number one on US News and World reports 2010 list of "Ten Service Groups That Are Making a Difference."<sup>52</sup>

These organizations represent several aspects that are present in the conventions of established modern Christian organizations seeking out social justice. They have incorporated themselves along rigid doctrinal statements that establish who and how they serve, they make use of stringent guidelines for who can affiliate themselves and be part of their organization based on belief and professional qualifications. Each utilizes their holdings of property and extensive network of contacts and donors to further their goals and they operate in way that reflects their size and influence. These organizations also have large systems of workers and contributors in place that allow for them act quickly in different areas and circumstances. With the success and growth of these organizations, they have become institutional in their size and practice, and operate by using top-down methodologies similar to the modern church.

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<sup>50</sup> International Justice Mission, "What We Do", IJM website, <http://www.ijm.org/our-work/what-we-do>, accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>51</sup> International Justice Mission, "IJM 2010 Annual Report", IJM website, <http://www.ijm.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/financial-documents/IJM-2010-Annual-Report.pdf>, (p. 20), accessed on 4/15/2012.

<sup>52</sup> Cathie Gandel, "10 Service Groups That Are Making a Difference: Individuals who have found innovative ways to tackle seemingly intractable problems", *US News*, 10/27/2010. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2010/10/27/10-service-groups-that-are-making-a-difference>, accessed on 4/15/2012.

Top-down implementation is most evident in the way that these organizations structure their power, and in turn develop a level of investment among ordinary participants. This is the major distinction between conventional social justice movements and the emerging movements to be focused on in the next section. Paid employees, qualified professionals and people within the Christian church comprise the majority of leadership in these organizations, and the majority of charitable actions on the behalf of others is conducted by them. Established conventional groups seek out participants via mass communicated means, and involve them most often in a tangential manner, such a donation or perhaps a sponsorship. The exclusive nature of involvement, and the large governance that requires hierarchical leadership is emblematic of established social justice institutions. Given the wide-ranging scope of these three organizations, it is difficult to effectively operate in a holistic, relational manner and emerging generations have taken it upon themselves to pursue social justice in a manner that caters to their preferences.

These recent movements favor an on the ground involvement and independent experience of the participant. This is not to say that there are not individualized or grassroots movements that are long standing, rather the norm for participation in Christian social justice movements has involved affiliation with established movements and organizations, rather than a bottom-up or on the ground methodology.

The bottom-up methodology reflects the desire for holistic efforts that involve more than just a short-term mission or donation along the conventional means of participation with existing bodies that may be bureaucratic or ineffective. In her article

discussing the future of the social gospel movement, Hinson-Hasty describes the skepticism of institutionalism that is felt by contemporary society. She writes, “People in our society distrust institutions, especially religious ones. Many people, particularly young adults, highly value personalized engagement in leadership and decision-making processes.”<sup>53</sup> These inclinations toward a holistic experience and involvement in social justice has led to emerging generations embracing new methods of participation in social justice. We find evidence of this reflected in recent movements initiated by members of the emerging generations that are involved in social justice. These groups use new methods and mediums of action and participation that take the preferences of the emerging generation into consideration when they engage in humanitarian and charitable efforts.

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, “The Future of the Social Gospel,” *Theology Today* 66 (2009): 72.

## CHAPTER FIVE: EMERGING SOCIAL JUSTICE

As previously discussed, the emerging generation favors relationships and experiences in forming their perceptions regarding the divine, and the same is true of participation in recent social justice movements. In the case of emerging social justice movements, the shift toward the experiential is demonstrated in the use of on the ground campaigning, narrative elements such as film and story, and more immediate experiences through savvy use of technology and intentional relationships. In her essay on grassroots culture, Sally Morgenthaler discusses leadership in a “flattened” world, where technology has advanced communication to unprecedented efficiency. She writes:

Never in the history of humankind have individuals and communities had the power to influence so much, so quickly. The rules of engagement have changed, and they have changed in favor of those who leave the addictive world of hierarchy to function relationally, intuitively, systematically, and contextually.<sup>54</sup>

Emerging social justice organizations have seized the opportunity under these new rules of engagement to make use of unconventional methods to be effective agents of social justice and to prompt the emerging generation to participate in the world around them, without relying on conventional institutions and methods. Emerging social justice groups utilize this dynamic approach toward spreading their message to effectively involve and invest the emerging generation in their activities. To describe this, let us turn our

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<sup>54</sup> Sally Morgenthaler, "Leadership in a Flattened World: Grassroots Culture and the Demise of the CEO Mode," in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 186.

attention to three organizations founded in the twenty-first century by those in the emerging generation that use different strategies to engage in social justice efforts.

Invisible Children is an advocacy and aid group based out of San Diego, CA that uses media strategies in the US and abroad to raise awareness and popular support of ending a long standing guerilla war in central Africa. Invisible Children was started after three recently graduated filmmakers traveled to central Africa to document suffering in Central Africa. In their travel they learned of the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan people. Upon documenting the pervasive suffering of children and ordinary Ugandans and creating a documentary film, the three toured and presented the film throughout the United States and gained popular support by using first-hand interactions and word of mouth to spread the film. In 2006, they formed a non-profit organization around the premise of sharing the story of the Ugandan people, and using that publicity to fund sustainable aid programs in the area to benefit the people, lobby political bodies and bring an end to the conflict with the LRA.<sup>55</sup>

The group's website states, "Invisible Children uses film, creativity and social action to end the use of child soldiers in Joseph Kony's rebel war and restore LRA affected communities in East and Central Africa to peace and prosperity."<sup>56</sup> The group has released several films in support of these aims that have been rapidly disseminated through social media outlets such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, as well as through word of mouth. This on the ground approach has recently culminated in the *Kony 2012*

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<sup>55</sup> Invisible Children, "Who We Are", Invisible Children website, <http://www.invisiblechildren.com/index.html>, accessed on 4/17/2012.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

campaign and promotional video that the group launched in March of 2012, amassing millions of independent views within days. Along with films, the group stages planned protests and sit-ins around the country in conjunction with their video campaigns. These efforts engage their participants in a sensory experience that allows the participant to enjoy in the narrative and form a greater level of investment with the cause.

In the early stages of the groups touring and promotion efforts, they networked with churches and Christian college students to find venues and opportunities that resonated with their individual Christian identities. The group no longer lists a Christian affiliation on their website, their founders do however identify themselves as Christians and cite their faith as factor in their reasoning for starting Invisible Children. In his *Atlantic* article, Kron describes Invisible Children's efforts and their decision to not outwardly publicize themselves as a Christian organization. He cites a 2006 edition of Invisible Children's website where they respond to the question of whether or not they are a Christian organization. They responded "No. The three filmmakers believe in Christ, but do not want to segregate themselves in any way. They believe that this story is not theirs to own/brand."<sup>57</sup> This decision to not self-identify as a Christian organization reflects the tone of emerging social justice to open up their narratives to anyone whose participation can further the goals of the organization at hand, whether they have a Christian background or not.

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<sup>57</sup> Invisible Children in Josh Kron, "Mission From God: The Upstart Christian Sect Driving Invisible Children and Changing Africa," *The Atlantic*, 4/10/2012. [http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/04/mission-from-god-the-upstart-christian-sect-driving-invisible-children-and-changing-africa/255626/2/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/04/mission-from-god-the-upstart-christian-sect-driving-invisible-children-and-changing-africa/255626/2/?single_page=true), accessed on 4/18/2012.

While the group does not overtly express their religious affiliations, the aims of the Christian founders and board of directors do align with the Christian imperatives of justice. Kron describes founder Jason Russell's feelings and aims in starting the organization while not affiliating. He writes:

He had found his mission. Russell would spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he was going to do it without talking about Jesus Christ. Rather, his plan was to embody the gospel by, as he put it, 'ending genocide.' And he was going to do it through a movie.<sup>58</sup>

By utilizing new media and grassroots methods, Invisible Children has undertaken Christian ministry and social justice in a innocuous manner. By framing their objectives in the manner most appealing to emerging generations, and using experiential and incarnational methodologies, Invisible Children has effectively engaged as a pivotal actor in the emerging social justice domain without relying solely on institutional affiliations with Christian bodies, instead using narrative and experience to prompt participation.

This shift toward narrative experience as a means of motivation is also demonstrated in other recent movements. To Write Love On Her Arms (TWLOHA) describes themselves as "A non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery."<sup>59</sup> Their name is derived from a story written about a young woman accompanying her friend through the depths of addiction and self-mutilation, and the beginnings of her rehabilitation. From this story, the movement developed by raising

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> To Write Love On Her Arms, "FAQ", TWLOHA website, <http://www.twloha.com/faq/>, accessed on 4/18/2012.



support and awareness of the perils of depression, suicide, addiction and self-mutilation amongst young people. The movement began by participants actually writing the word “love” on their arms and wearing t-shirts and bracelets bearing the words “To Write Love On Her Arms.” This trend gained traction among musicians and their fans, using social media and word of mouth. The organization developed around the publicity of these practices and TWLOHA became advocates for awareness and a resource for those seeking help. Today TWLOHA functions as means for individuals to donate to causes that give practical help to those in need and as advocates for awareness about depression, addiction, suicide and self-harm.

The crux of TWLOHA’s work rests on the story that was written in 2006 for the benefit of a friend. Through a compelling testimony of helping a friend through a difficult time, TWLOHA has offered the sought-after experiential narrative that resonates with the emerging generation. TWLOHA expands on the narrative focus in their solicitations for involvement. They operate the “Storytellers” campaign among high school students, which relies on students sharing stories of pain to raise awareness, organize street teams to spread their message, use social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter and others to quickly and effectively share information and continue to sell branded merchandise to visually put their message into public view. These efforts enable TWLOHA to effectively communicate their message with mass appeal to the emerging generation. TWLOHA is wary of potentially disenfranchising participants.

In TWLOHA’s founding narrative, the writer describes the hopelessness that is experienced upon her friend’s denial from a rehabilitation center until she undergoes

detoxification. She writes, “We become her hospital and the possibility of healing fills our living room with life. It is unspoken and there are only a few of us, but we will be her church, the body of Christ coming alive to meet her needs, to write love on her arms.”<sup>60</sup>

This overt implication of Christian love and service in the foundations of the movement gives the impression of Christian affiliation for the group, but TWLOHA clarifies their stance in their frequently asked questions section of their website. In response to the question of whether or not they are a Christian organization they respond:

No. Identifying something such as a band, store, venue or project as ‘Christian’ often alienates those outside of the church/Christian culture, and we don't want to do that. TWLOHA aims to be inclusive and inviting.<sup>61</sup>

TWLOHA acknowledges the emerging generation’s skeptical and disillusioned perceptions of Christianity, and does not affiliate itself in order to be an effective agent of change and justice. This trend is seen also in Invisible Children’s Christian origins, and declination to identify themselves along institutional lines. This trend away from affiliation is corroborated in the missions and establishment of other emerging social justice movements, such as Love146.

Love146 is a non-profit organization that works to end child sex slavery around the globe, and provides aftercare and rehabilitation to rescued children. They describe their mission as: “Abolition and Restoration! We combat child sex slavery & exploitation

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<sup>60</sup> To Write Love On Her Arms, “The Story”, TWLOHA website, <http://www.twloha.com/vision/story/>, accessed on 4/18/2012.

<sup>61</sup> To Write Love On Her Arms, “FAQ”, TWLOHA website, <http://www.twloha.com/faq/>, accessed on 4/18/2012.

with the unexpected and restore survivors with excellence.”<sup>62</sup> Love146 approaches the enormous challenge of ending child slavery and sexual exploitation with an emphasis on providing aftercare to those rescued from bondage, and also in working on the ground with individuals, students, small organizations and local law enforcement to prevent future abuses.<sup>63</sup> Collaboration with individuals is the primary way that Love146 spreads its message and pursues justice.

Similarly to TWLOHA, Love146 derives its name from a story, which has been used as the basis for the methods of practice. Telling and sharing the story of one little girl who impacted the founders of the organization is the primary means of introducing the organization and challenges they fight to potential participants. Narrative serves as the medium for Love146 to communicate their aims and motivations, and they encourage others to do the same in a on the ground manner to make the issues of child sex slavery known. Their website section titled “Get Involved” invites participants to 1) Share their story, 2) Join a local on the ground task force, and 3) Become a partner with the organization (financially).<sup>64</sup> These methods demonstrate the preference for experiential and relational practices among the emerging generation, and offer participants the opportunity to participate through the usual means of donation, but also through relationally involved methods as well. Also, in the vein of Invisible Children and TWLOHA, Love146 plays down any Christian leanings they have. In their frequently

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<sup>62</sup> Love146, “About Us”, Love 146 website, <http://love146.org/about-us>, accessed on 4/19/2012.

<sup>63</sup> Love146, “The Love146 Response”, Love146 website, <http://love146.org/map>, accessed on 4/19/2012.

<sup>64</sup> Love146, “Get Involved”, Love146 website, <http://love146.org/get-involved>, accessed on 4/19/2012.

asked questions page they respond to the query of whether or not they are faith based by responding:

No. Though the co-founders of Love146 are inspired by Christian faith, a system of faith is not required to work at Love146 and we value the diverse perspectives of our staff and supporters. We readily embrace all those who unite in our common vision of the abolition of child sex slavery and exploitation.<sup>65</sup>

This trend away from Christian affiliation reinforces not only Kinnaman and Lyon's assertions about non-Christian's negative perceptions of Christianity, but also the skepticism that emerging generations have of large institutions.

This movement away from affiliation marks the shift away from conventional practices that emerging social justice has taken. As presented in the previous section, established Christian social justice movements rely on large donor bases, political and legal connections and strict organizations and hierarchy that increase their size, impact and influence. These are combined with an overt affiliation with the Christian faith, which they use as a primary motivator for their work. The emerging generation perceives these models in established bodies to be bureaucratic and lacking in experiential content. As the emerging generation has involved itself in social justice they rely on grassroots campaigning (aided largely by social media), they embrace experiential components found in narratives such as stories and films, and look past institutional affiliations in favor of a greater impact that can still complement the Christian affiliations of members and participants.

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<sup>65</sup> Love146, "FAQ", Love146 website, <http://love146.org/faq#faith%20based>, accessed on 4/19/2012.

While the emerging generation did not invent grassroots methods, and they are not the only ones to use them, they are unique in that they primarily promote through a bottom-up style. Small organizations born in the age of the Internet make good use of their technological fluency to reach much of their demographic effectively. Bennett describes in his book *Culture and Everyday Life* that:

New media forms have also has significant impact on the nature of everyday life, further blurring the boundaries between public and private space and offering more rapid forms of communication between individuals in regionally and globally diffuse areas.<sup>66</sup>

The advent and widespread usage of the Internet and its ability to spread information at a greater rate has made sharing ideas and stories easier than ever before. When social media sources are coupled with word of mouth, and savvy promotion in sub-cultures, for example, what TWLOHA has done with the underground music scene or Invisible Children with high school and college students, emerging social justice organizations have an open medium to share their stories.

The sharing of stories sets emerging movements apart from their forebears as well. While most are familiar with scenes of poverty and staggering figures of mortality and suffering on late night infomercials, emerging social justice utilizes fully formed narrative devices in a manner that allows a plurality of meanings to be abstracted from a source, versus concrete facts that might be used to engender only a singular response. The films that Invisible Children has released and the stories that TWOLHA and Love146 found themselves on allow the viewer or reader to take away whatever response they have discerned from the narrative. This creates a greater sense of identification and

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<sup>66</sup> Bennett, *Culture and Everyday Life*, 89.

solidarity with the presenter, and lets the reader or viewer feel or have a sense of involvement in the story themselves. O'Boyle writes in his article on social justice:

Acknowledging our participation in these networks illuminates two points. First, a person has a duty to contribute to whatever elements he or she belongs to, say family, workplace, and nation-state, and a corresponding right to whatever goods are produced in common by those elements. Second, more comprehensive elements in the social order have a duty according to the principle of subsidiarity not to interfere in the production of less comprehensive elements and to help those less comprehensive elements produce more effectively.<sup>67</sup>

Emerging social justice movements recognize that by creating a sense of investment with their participants, they will gain support that will continue to be productive on their own due to their increased level of investment in the movement. By gaining more devoted participants, an organization can reliably spread their message and reach out to more people, and ultimately make a greater impact. In allowing for each participant to form his or her own unique interpretations via a narrative device, the control of meaning is effectively decentralized making everyone a shareholder in the issue at hand.

Whether this difference is made in the name of Christian faith is another issue. Each of the three emerging social justice organizations I have described has some level of Christian influence, be it in the affiliations of their founders or as part of their seminal narrative. However, each of these organizations has chosen to not outwardly identify themselves as a Christian or faith based group for fear that they could potentially exclude someone. This process reflects Raschke's notion that:

Incarnational ministry in a globopomo setting, therefore, means setting aside even

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<sup>67</sup> Edward J. O'Boyle, "Social Justice: Addressing the Ambiguity", *Logos* 14:2, (2011), 106.

the Christian/non-Christian distinction, particularly when being a Christian turns out to be a barrier against being Christ to one another.<sup>68</sup>

The movement away from overt affiliation sets these emerging social justice movements apart from their forebears, and yet does not make them distinctly non-Christian. Even without a distinct Christian affiliation, the Christian actors involved in the movements, or their Christian participants can still work incarnationally as Christian agents to bring about social justice in a relational and experiential manner by “Becoming all things to all people” as the apostle Paul describes his ministry in 1 Corinthians 9:22. These post-modern Christian actors are able to engage a post-modern audience and offer their narrative for anyone to participate in, whether they affiliate as a Christian or not. This ability to serve those in need according to Christian doctrines, without excluding non-Christians is a strength of emerging social justice movements, as they can meet diverse needs, without excluding.

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<sup>68</sup> Raschke, *GloboChrist*, 65.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

Through an examination of the methods and practices of modern American evangelical Christian and conventional methods of established Christian based social justice organizations, I have asserted that they utilize techniques and methods well suited to conveying their agendas to large audiences and embrace the top-down methodologies. They have cultivated an atmosphere of corporatism, and offer a consumeristic way of doing church. Fundamental doctrine dominates modern congregations, and interpretation is left to the few in power. This emphasis on hierarchy gives freedom of spiritual interpretation only to the few in power and the opportunity to engage is limited to specific avenues such as financial donation or attendance. Emerging models, manifest in the emerging church and recent social justice movements I have described as “emerging social justice,” have challenged the practices that have become normative standards of outreach and practice.

Emerging models are fluid and allow for diverse views of doctrine and practice, so there can only be broad strokes painted in describing the emerging church. The consistent elements of the emerging models do however stand in contrast to those of the modern and established. The impact of post-modern thought in the millennial generation is the undeniable motivator for these shifts in evangelical and social justice practice. The



response movements serve as far more effective actors on the post-modern landscape than their predecessors. Novel methods of worship dominate emerging church services, and the ability for a plurality of meanings to be extracted from scripture appeals to the experiential and narrative preference of the emerging generation. In social justice, on the ground involvement and participatory narratives have developed as simultaneous responses to post-modern preferences. The stand out indicator in the shift is the movement towards experiential methods that allow a participant to experience what they are involving themselves in, in an emotional and visceral way. The investment and solidarity that comes about from experiencing something is a meaningful practice for the emerging generation, which places high value on that which they can experience and derive their own meanings from, rather than a corporate and consumer atmosphere cultivated in modern churches.

The incarnational ministries of emerging churches and on the ground methodologies of emerging social justice movements are the platforms of these experiential practices of outreach for these movements. By engaging relationally with the people they seek to convey themselves to, emerging actors have secured a place in the realm of post-modern Christianity by effectively communicating with and involving the emerging generation better than their predecessors.

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