

brotherhood of believers and show proper respect for everyone who worships with us.

Worship has power to completely transform our lives. God desires to connect with us. Worship can help make that happen. I ask that you pray that God would continue to show you and me exactly what he has in mind as we journey into the future. I also ask whatever you do, whether in word or deed, that you will do it in the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus. And as you do those things, give thanks to God the Father and worship him above all things.

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#### NOTES

1. Tim Celek and Dieter Zander with Patrick Kampert, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 26.
2. A.W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc.), 23.
3. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 49.
4. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 122.
5. Sally Morgenthaler, "Leading vs. Performance," *Worship Leader* (July/August 1997), 16.
6. From the song "I Am So Thankful," John S. Miller.

# Chapter 9

## A New Reformation:

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### Re-Creating Worship for a Postmodern World

by LEONARD SWEET

The journal *Philosophy and Literature*, published by the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch, New Zealand, periodically gives Gold Medal awards in the "Bad Writing Contest." One of the recent award winners was the distinguished scholar Fredric Jameson, whose opening sentence in *Signatures of the Visible* (1998) gives a portent of what follows:

The visual is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination; thinking about its attributes becomes an attribute to that, if it is unwilling to betray its object; while the most austere films necessarily draw their energy from the attempt to repress their own excess (rather than from the more thankless effort to discipline the viewer).

In close second was a professor of English, Rob Wilson. His "winning" paragraph went like this:

If such a sublime cyborg would insinuate the future as post-Fordist subject, his palpably masochistic locations as ecstatic agent of the sublime superstate need to be decoded as the 'now-all-but-unreadable DNA' of a fast deindustrializing Detroit, just as his Robocop-like strategy of carceral negotiation and street control remains the tirelessly American one of inflicting regeneration through violence upon the racially heteroglossic wilds and others of the inner city.<sup>1</sup>

Easy for him to say. But it is not just academics who are speaking and writing in "secret code" language that reflects their professional class or occupational superiority. From the perspective of "outsiders" in this post-Christian culture, much of mainline Protestantism has been speaking in a foreign language for decades.

In the midst of one of the greatest transitions in the history of Christianity—from modern to postmodern—mainline churches remain stuck in a modern paradigm. They have clung to modern modes of thought and action, their ways of embodying and enacting the Christian tradition frozen in patterns of modernity.

The decline of mainline Christianity is so well-documented it needs no rehearsing here. In fact, the mainline plight has passed into the realm of humor. At a recent board meeting of a community agency, someone used the phrase "mainline churches." Someone else asked, "What are mainline churches?" A third snapped back, "The ones with the fewest people."

For the first time in U.S. American history more people are attending non-denominational than denominationally affiliated churches. In one year alone (1997 to 1998), average church size plummeted over 10 percent, with a drop of 15 percent during the same twelve-month period in annual operating budgets.<sup>2</sup> The fact is that most of the mainline church is in serious deterioration or comatose.

My favorite example of how out of touch mainliners can be with the emerging postmodern world all around them is a throwaway line from Marc Driscoll, Gen-X pastor at Seattle's thriving Mars Hill Fellowship. Driscoll says his challenge in reaching postmoderns is not convincing them that Jesus rose from the dead or that there could be such a thing as a resurrection. His biggest challenge is in convincing postmoderns that there was only one resurrection.

The mainline church went to sleep in a modern world governed by the gods of reason and observation. It is awakening to a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience. Indeed, one of the last places postmoderns expect to be "spiritual" is the church. In the midst of a spiritual heat wave in the host culture, the mainline church is in the midst of a deep freeze.

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The mainline crisis is of "EPIC" proportions. It will take more than a Martha Stewart makeover or spiritual plastic surgery to make mainline worship vital to a postmodern culture. Unless mainline churches can transition their worship into more EPIC directions—Experiential, Participatory, Image-Based, and Communal—they stand the real risk of becoming museum churches, nostalgic testimonies to a culture that is no more.

## From Rational to Experiential

A modernist dies and finds himself surrounded by dense, billowy clouds which only allow him to see a short distance ahead of him. He sees that he is walking down a road paved in gold. Ahead, there is a slight break in the clouds. He sees a signpost and a fork in the

*“Sometimes you cannot believe what you see, you have to believe what you feel.”*

*—Brandeis professor Morrie Schwartz to Mitch Albom in Tuesdays With Morrie.*<sup>3</sup>

road. The signpost has inscriptions with golden arrows pointing to the left and right.

The modernist reads them. The right arrow says, “This way to heaven.” The left arrow says, “This way to a discussion about heaven.”

Guess which fork the modernist took?

The perpetual openness to experience of postmoderns is such that one can never underestimate the e-factor: experiential.

Welsh priest and poet R.S. Thomas, when out walking in the countryside of Wales, has a custom of putting his hand in the place where a hare has recently lain, hoping to find it still warm.<sup>4</sup>

Postmoderns are constantly putting their hands and the rest of themselves where God may have visited; hoping it’s still warm. They are hungry for experiences, especially experiences of God.

The postmodern economy is an experience-based economy. In my lifetime we have transitioned from an industrial economy (which manufactured widgets) to an information economy (which generated information) to an experience economy (which traffics in experiences). The precise nature of this new economy has been summarized exquisitely by Marilyn Carlson Nelson, the new Chair, President, and CEO of Carlson Companies, one of the world’s largest privately held companies:

Anyone who views a sale as a transaction is going to be toast down the line. Selling is not about peddling a product. It’s about wrapping that product in a service—and about selling both the product and the service as an experience. That approach to selling helps create a vital element of the process: a relationship. In a world where things move at hyperspeed, what was relevant yesterday may not be relevant tomorrow. But one thing that endures is a dynamic relationship that is

grounded in an experience that you’ve provided.<sup>5</sup>

Already U.S. American consumers spend more on entertainment than on health care or clothing.<sup>6</sup> Whatever happened to the fountain pen? Ask Mont Blanc how much high-tech postmoderns want high-touch experiences with their fingers.

REI’s flagship store in Seattle looks more like a retail amusement park than a store. One of the country’s largest wilderness-sports stores (100,000 square feet; 60,000 stock items), the consumer cooperative Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), boasts places for customers to interact with and experience some of the products it sells—a seven-story climbing wall; a 300-foot waterfall; a 475-foot-long biking trail and test track; a one hundred-seat cafe; a rain room for testing how waterproof Leak-Tex is; a lab where camp stoves can be tried out; and so on. The aisles between departments are even designed to resemble hiking trails.

Honda has based an entire sales strategy on an “experiential” foundation. Honda’s success with its four hundred supplier companies throughout North America is based on what it calls The Three Joys. According to The Three Joys, each component in the “car experience” (customer, employee, supplier) should enjoy the “experience.” Customers should have a positive experience of ownership. The dealer who connects the customer to the supplier should enjoy the experience of bringing pleasure to the customer—high customer satisfaction. Honda, who supplies the product, should enjoy the experience of pleasing both other parties with such a superb product.

*“Engineering. Science. Technology. All worthless...unless they make you feel something.”—ad for BMW’s 3-Series cars*

Why is tourism one of if not *the* fastest growing industry in the

world? It creates a new job every 2.5 seconds and generates investments of \$3.2 billion *a day*. Almost two trillion dollars is spent annually on tourism worldwide, accounting for one-tenth of the global economic impact. More than 200 million people are employed worldwide by an industry that will grow to 350 million employees by 2005.<sup>7</sup>

Some scholars interpret the touristic phenomenon as a post-modern ritual that performs the same role as sacred rites did in pre-modern societies. Heritage tourism appeals to a culture's search for "authenticity," "otherness," "identity," and educational experiences while vacationing.

In 1994, 528 million people traveled for the pleasure of experiences of "otherness." By 2010 this figure is expected to rise to 937 million. Half the world's vacationers head to the sea each year—and half the world's people live within fifty miles or so of saltwater. But tourism has reached every region of the globe—from the mountains to the desert, from the polar icecaps to the tropical rain forests. It will soon reach the moon first and then Mars. What will get us there will not be government space agencies, but Hilton and Ritz-Carlton.

Why is travel and tourism the United States' largest export industry as well as our second largest employer (after health) and third largest retail industry (after automotive and food store sales)?

Because tourism is an experience industry. The fastest-growing segment of tourism is adventure travel, with over two hundred travel books appearing each month catered to this clientele. Adventure travel will likely become in our lifetime the largest commercial use of space once reusable launchers reduce costs sufficiently for space tours to orbiting space stations. It is not surprising that in an experience economy frequent mall shopping would plummet, down from 16 percent in 1987 to fewer than 10 percent in 1998. Yet at the same time the Mall of America (Bloomington, Minnesota) now hosts more

visitors than Walt Disney World, Disneyland, and the Grand Canyon combined.<sup>8</sup> Why? It's not a mall, but an experience center.

Here's the point: *In postmodern culture, the experience is the message.* Postmoderns literally "feel" their way through life. If postmodern worship can't make people furiously *feel* and *think* (in the old "modern" world, we would have said only "think"), it can't show them how God's Word transforms the way we "feel."

Postmodern preachers don't "write sermons"—they create experiences. And these *Shekhinah* experiences (*Shekhinah* is the Hebrew term for the divine presence) bring together all the senses—sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell—into a radiant glowing of God's presence dwelling with God's people suffused in the ethereal light of beauty, truth, and goodness.

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It will not be easy for mainline Protestantism to make this transition to worship that meets the "wow" standard. As much as the modern university, the mainline church is the intellectual outgrowth of the Enlightenment, which tried to make the critical use of reason, not experience, the touchstone of knowledge. Jane Miller recalls her experience at Cambridge in the mid-twentieth century: "I have to admit, I believed you should not include anything you actually thought or felt in an essay."<sup>9</sup>

The triumph of Enlightenment rationalism in worship is demonstrated in the statistics of a 1998 Barna Research Group study, which found that 32 percent of all types of regular churchgoers have never experienced God's presence in worship. Forty-four percent have not experienced God's presence in the past year. And the younger you are, the less likely you are to have a religious experience in worship.

As appalling as these figures are, the percentages would be even higher if mainline Protestants were isolated out for comparison.

At a gathering of seven hundred mainliners, I watched in amazement as the entire congregation obediently followed the instructions in the bulletin, turned to the page for the black spiritual "Amen, Amen" and read from their hymnals, with heads bowed and legs braced, the one-word song: "A-men, a-men, a-men, a-men, a-men." It's definitely time for a change.

## From Representative to Participatory

Here's a conversation overheard in a restaurant:

"Give me a Coke."

"Would you like a Classic Coke, a New Coke, a Cherry Coke, or a Diet Coke?"

"I'd like a Diet Coke."

"Would you like a regular Diet Coke or a caffeine-free Diet Coke?"

"The heck with it. Give me a 7UP."

**P**ostmoderns don't give their undivided attention to much of anything without it being interactive.

A choice culture is by definition a participatory culture. Postmoderns don't give their undivided attention to much of anything without it being interactive. In fact, the more digital the culture becomes, the more participatory it gets. The notion that electronic culture produces "couch potatoes" has pock-

marked the mind of the church for too long. The truth is just the opposite. The more you surf the Internet, the more you become "surf bored," as Jim L. Wilson puts it,<sup>10</sup> and want to surf the real thing.

This is one reason for the decreasing popularity of television in

postmodern culture. The finale of *Seinfeld* attracted 76.3 million viewers in 1998. The finale of *Cheers* attracted 80.5 million viewers in 1993. The finale of *M\*A\*S\*H* attracted 106 million viewers in 1983. That's a drop of 30 million viewers while during the same time the total number of television households grew by 16 million.<sup>11</sup>

Why? Television isn't nearly interactive enough. With a wired universe, each person can be a programmer, not just an observer. Television news has a stable audience only among those fifty or older. Everyone else is getting his or her information elsewhere. No wonder interactivity is the central focus of content providers, with an interactive *Sesame Street* now being prepared that will run on WebTV.

In economics there are fewer "professionals" as more people are becoming their own online stockbrokers and with an astonishing 41 percent of U.S. households having become stockholders.

In religion there are no more "professional clergy" and pew-sitting laity. There are only ministers who look to leaders to mobilize and release ministry through them.

Naturally this shift in culture also applies in worship. Postmoderns want interactive, immersive, in-your-face participation in the mystery of God. That's why they are attracted to the power and mystery of Pentecostalism—which is the fastest growing religious movement in the world.<sup>12</sup> That desire to explore the "mystery" of worship has also drawn postmoderns toward neo-traditional faiths. Sometimes, in fact, the Pentecostals and the neo-traditionalists have actually combined forces. For example, there is a fifteen hundred-seat sanctuary Pentecostal church in Valdosta, Georgia, which converted en masse to the Book of Common Prayer, with a bishop of the Episcopal Church carrying out the confirmation of the entire congregation on Good Friday 1990.

Postmodern worship is body worship. Body piercings show postmodern desperation for rituals, including body rituals. People

are narrating the story of their lives on their bodies through multiple piercings (a dozen piercings are not uncommon). The role of spectacle in worship is only beginning to be understood.

Ironically it is the screen that releases postmoderns to “put their whole being” into worship and frees them up from being chained in place by books. Sometimes the preaching will become more karaoke, other times more kinesthetic. But whatever form preaching takes, the interactive component is crucial. Unless postmoderns can complete the sentence for themselves, or at least have the opportunity to hold the mike themselves, worship will insufficiently help them create new realities for their lives.

Faced with a smorgasbord of choices, some people don’t select one or the other. They select nothing at all. That’s why the neo-traditional movement will become stronger than it is now. But while many couples want traditional weddings with all the trimmings, they want tradition “neo.” “Neo” for them means tradition customized and personalized. Even neo-traditionalists make the tradition interactive. If they can’t take tradition and run with it down their own path, they won’t pick it up.

## From Word-Based to Image-Driven

“If you want people to think differently,” Buckminster Fuller used to say, “don’t tell them how to think, give them a tool.” The best tool worship leaders can give people to help them think and live differently is a metaphor or image. Nietzsche was right: “We do not think good metaphors are anything very important, but I think a good metaphor is something even the police should keep an eye on.”<sup>13</sup>

To sculpt a metaphor is to transform the world. Metaphor (such as metaphor evangelism or metaphor preaching) is the medium through

which postmodern spirituality is created for a variety of reasons.

First, humans think in images, not words. In a visualholic culture like postmodernity it is difficult not to believe that using metaphorical “pictures” would make worship more meaningful. But our “image-driven” lifestyle isn’t distinctive to postmodern culture, but to the human mind itself. The human mind is made-up of metaphors. In defining realities, metaphors create realities. Metaphors consist of both thought and action. Metaphors are more than matters of language.

Metaphor is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect—it involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, and so on. These dimensions structure not only mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well.<sup>14</sup>

That’s why the power of liturgy is so immense. The ultimate in power is the ability to order and ordain metaphors.

Postmodern spirituality is image-based for a second reason. Postmodern culture is a double-ring culture,<sup>15</sup> and metaphors are themselves a double ring. Philosopher Max Black calls them “two ideas in one phrase” (for example, “sweet smile” or “sharp tongue”). Part of this double-ring effect comes from the shaping influence of chaos theory and complexity science, which look at the whole—the system—rather than the parts. In searching for similarities, complexity thinking invites metaphorical thinking and linking.

Third, worship is not about style; it’s about spirit. If the “spirit” isn’t right, presentation means little—no matter how contemporary or high-tech. Ten times zero is still zero. And, if the Spirit is there, presentation also means little—no matter how traditional or bookish.

Linda S. McCoy is pastor of The Garden in Indianapolis, which meets in a Beef and Boards Dinner Theater facility. The musical

group The Good Earth Band leads worshippers seated around tables through heavy helpings of video clips, drama, secular music, and contemporary Christian music—keeping the service to a thrifty forty minutes. A flowerpot container at the door is the only offering plate.

The importance of shifting worship from the exegesis of words to the exegesis of images in the postmodern world was hammered home from studies of companies in *Built to Last* (1996). Two Stanford Business School professors discovered to their surprise that the key to great companies is not “visionary leadership” by some entrepreneurial CEO, but the creation of a network of shared meaning and values around common metaphors that abide and guide the company into the future.<sup>16</sup>

## From Individual to Communal

Why is Times Square the most popular place to greet the new millennium? Why are coffee bars the new dating places? Why is the Internet becoming less an information medium than a social medium, with more and more people logging on, not to gain information but to hear “You’ve Got Mail” and even to find love online?

Relationship issues stand at the heart of postmodern culture. In classic double-ring fashion, the more digitally enhanced the culture becomes, the more we are drawn to flesh-and-blood interaction.

At the heart of postmodernity lies a theological dyslexia: Call it “me/we,” or the experience of individual-in-community. Think back on the flowers that were strewn on the sidewalks as part of Princess Diana’s funeral. Something registered in your subconscious about those mounds of flowers, even if you didn’t call it to rational or verbal consciousness. What was unique about those flowers?

In the medieval world, where everything was communal and

nothing was individual, grieving villagers would have been content to simply pile flowers on top of other flowers. In the modern world, where everything was individual and little was communal, we arranged single bouquets of flowers in individual vases and put them on the altar or grave. In postmodern culture, we put our flowers back on the communal pile, but wrap them in cellophane or plastic to separate them from the crowd. A postmodern “me” needs “we” to “be.”

Electronic culture necessitates longer pastoral tenures, not shorter. Building relationships of trust and intimacy in a post-Christian culture takes time. The transient nature of the culture requires that our community-building and hospitality be more aggressive, not less—more premeditated, not haphazard. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s conviction that an anti-Christian culture can actually work for the good of Christianity presupposes a vibrant communal life where people of faith can teach each other to live by faith—which is what God intended in the first place.

The future promises a second coming of communal customs and values. Postmoderns are disillusioned with the hyper-individualism of modern society. In the words of Gen Xer Tom Beaudoin, “My generation inherited not free love but AIDS, not peace but nuclear anxiety, not cheap communal lifestyles but crushing costs of living, not free teach-ins but colleges priced for aristocracy.”<sup>17</sup>

Part of this quest for community and communal dimensions of life appear retro and neo-traditional: white wedding gowns, dance halls (swing dancing, ballroom dancing), even church fellowship halls. But the individual quest for communal rituals runs deep. To address this hunger for community, vital worship will need to upgrade four elements. First, three-quarters of all pastors see themselves as gifted either at teaching or preaching.<sup>18</sup> Yet Jesus’ ministry had three components: preaching, teaching, and healing. If moral and spiritual transformation is to occur communally as well as individually, pastors

will need to upgrade their healing role and hone their healing skills to at least the same levels as preaching and teaching.

Second, like everything else in postmodern culture, worship needs to be decentralized. Postmodern culture brings in its wake a double edge toward global hypercentralization and local decentralization. The one big refrigerator has been replaced by refrigerators you can find in places other than kitchens—bedrooms, family room bars, playrooms, grill areas, custom installed in every cabinet or drawer. Already the California Legislature has considered two proposals to divide California into two new states. Already some twenty-five counties have voted to secede from California.

Worship must become a key component to every small, separate cell group that is free to worship in its own way while integrated into the larger church. Eighty-five percent of churches now offer cell group opportunities, each one of which should include a worship component.

Third, storytelling creates community. The narrative quality of experience is a deeply religious issue. We organize our experience through narrative. We inhabit a storied reality.<sup>19</sup> The modern world exalted abstract principles over “stories.” In fact, the poet John Betjeman defined an intellectual as simply a nonvisual person.<sup>20</sup>

The very word “abstract” comes from the Greek *ab*, which means “to move away from,” and *strahere*, which means “to stand.” To have an abstract relationship with something, one has to stand away from it. To tell a story, one has to step into it and hold it tightly. In fact, according to New Testament scholar Tom Boomershine, “To say ‘Let me tell you a story’ is like saying, ‘Let’s go play.’”<sup>21</sup>

The gospel has lost its original character as a living storytelling tradition of messengers who told the good news of the victory of Jesus...telling stories is foreign to contemporary experience. We continue to read Bible stories to children. But the assumption is

that once you grow up and learn to think you will stop telling stories and start telling the truth. Telling the truth means you will speak in conceptual abstractions.<sup>22</sup>

Telling stories in a digital culture may take any number of forms in worship: oral, audio, video, television, films, multimedia, and CD-ROM.

Fourth, postmoderns need active worship that leads to service and social transformation. In the words of history of religions scholar Huston Smith, “The heart of religion is not altered states but altered traits of character. For me, then, the test of a substance’s religious worth or validity is not what kind of far-out experience it can produce, but is the life improved by its use?”<sup>23</sup>

Forget an annual Mission Sunday. Make every day a mission day and every worship service a mission service. In fact, worship services need to be precisely what they say they are: worship service.

## Worship and the “New” Way of Thinking

Modern worship has been trapped in foundationalist thinking where the divine is “out there” to be hauled in by objective methods. EPIC worship will need to evolve in concert with three forces of thought and culture, all of which are creating what is known as a “postmodern.” These three forces are (1) postmodern hermeneutics, (2) the hard sciences themselves, and (3) cognition research.

Mainline Protestantism’s predominant model of sit-and-soak worship cannot hold up under postmodern hermeneutics and philosophy. It’s helpful to remember that just as the Protestant Reformation was a worship revolution wrought by changes in hermeneutics and epistemology, so the current Postmodern Reformation is witnessing revolutions in worship styles and functions wrought by similar forces.

*Postmodern Hermeneutics.* Why has “praise” music had such a



hard time of it in mainline circles? Partly because the modern age was temperamentally allergic to praise. The scientific method was a “critical” method, and moderns were trained to critique, not to cheerlead—to assess, not to applaud.

The postmodern hermeneutics of learning through “interactive observation” are dethroning the old epistemological beliefs that pure learning comes via an under-glass analysis of cold logic, hard facts, and critical distance from the “object” of knowledge. Postmodern theorists are charting the course to a new “scientific method,” one whose modes of knowledge are more relational, more experiential, more image-based, and more celebratory and communal.

Unlike their cerebral predecessors, postmodernists believe there are multiple ways of seeing the world. For example, there is more than a single way of “knowing” a flower. One way (more Western) of “knowing” a flower is to be full of oneself, one’s wits and wisdom, and to throw oneself against the flower as an object. The other way (more Eastern) of “knowing” is really a way of “unknowing”: to be “empty” of oneself and to let the flower reveal itself as it is. The first way of “knowing” a flower is to experiment with it as something separate, to stand at a distance from it, and pick it apart. The second way of knowing a flower is to experience it, to enter in rather than stand back; to stand under (there is no ultimate understanding without standing under) and participate in its beauty.

Knowledge by dissection analytically takes apart; knowledge by dance synthetically puts together. In one you are rich—full of yourself. In one you are poor—empty of yourself. In one you are a distant observer or critic. In one you are an intimate lover.

For the postmodern worshipper, objectivity can no longer be the sole objective of the pursuit of truth. Love can be as much a mode of knowledge as the old scientific method’s detachment. Thus a

worshipper is both active and reflective, participating and observing, both in and out of the experience.

*Hard Sciences.* The second influence turning the church toward an EPIC methodology is the “hard” sciences themselves. Chilean immunologist/biologist turned neuroscientist Francisco Varela once remarked that the “hard” sciences deal with the “soft” questions, and the “soft” sciences deal with the “hard” questions. But one of the hardest issues of life is the nature of truth, and here science itself is leading the way in pioneering a new “scientific method” and showing how the old “objective” pursuit of truth is not intellectually sound. The implications of this “new scientific method” for the worshipper are monumental.

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**W**e do not see things as they are but as we are.—Jewish proverb

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Let me give a smattering of examples to explain what I mean. Particle physicist Edwin Schrödinger states the new paradigm eloquently: The world has not been given to us twice—once in spiritual or psychological terms and once in material terms. The world has been given once. The distinction between subjectivity and objectivity has been useful, but specious.

When Thomas Kuhn wrote his classic text on the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he was only embellishing what Albert Einstein and Karl Popper, in their ruminations on the course of scientific discovery, had already taught us. Both stressed that science advances not through the logic of induction or deduction but through imaginative leaps of faith.<sup>24</sup> A “paradigm shift” is an act of faith which creates new facts and new realities.

In this new approach to science, value and faith commitments become rational parts of a scholar’s search for truth. Lorraine Code puts it this way: “Subjectivity—however conflicted and multiple—becomes

part of the conditions that make knowledge possible."<sup>25</sup>

Physicist Fred Alan Wolf also lent his support to this new view of reality when he boiled quantum physics down to this statement: "The universe does not exist independent of the thought of the observer" and "You will see it when you believe it."<sup>26</sup> Physicist John Wheeler has advised his colleagues to "cross out that old word 'observer' and replace it by the new word 'participator.'"<sup>27</sup>

Of course, the old scientific method still has its defenders. But one of the untold stories of our time is the movement of the scientific community beyond the modern scientific method. One can see it manifested in British science writer Bryan Appleyard's protestations about "the appalling spiritual damage that science has done" by ignoring questions of meaning and purpose.<sup>28</sup> Or scientist Donald A. Norman's laments over the spiritual and moral vacuum in which much of science is conducted.<sup>29</sup>

*Cognition Theories:* The third set of influences pushing the church in EPIC directions is the postmodern critique of the modern mindset and especially the emergence of "cognitive sciences." The field of cognition, which includes multiple academic disciplines of neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, genetics, computer science (especially artificial intelligence), anthropology, and philosophy, is generating new insights almost faster than they can be written down.

While some theologians whimper over the loss of modernity's fixed foundations and grounded reference points, scholars such as Humberto Maturana, Gregory Bateson, Heinz von Foerster, George Lakoff, Zenon W. Pylyshyn, Francisco Varela, Eleanor Rosch, and Michael Polanyi are showing how to live and move in an interdependent, relational mindset. Their work is shifting our perspectives from control to flow, from abstract and disembodied reason to embodied and imaginative reason, from representation to participation, from literalism to metaphor.<sup>30</sup>

Barbara McClintock, a geneticist who won the Nobel Prize in 1983 for her lifetime work on the genetics of corn, dissented from modern ways of knowing and suspended the boundaries between subject and object. She developed "a feeling for the organism," and told her biographer Evelyn Fox Keller that things are "much more marvelous than the scientific method allows us to conceive."<sup>31</sup>

The work in the biology of cognition done by Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela has shown that cognition is not a representation of the world out there but "an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself."<sup>32</sup>

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**Y***ou only see what you know.*  
—*African proverb*

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In many Mediterranean cultures, beauty is more than an intellectual aesthetic. It is an aesthetic of experience, participation, images, and communal celebration. The French scholar Pierre Babin tells of seeing a number of elders sitting motionless under a tree, staring at a picturesque mountain range. He commented to the elders, "Beautiful, isn't it?" They responded, "We feel good here." Babin, unsure whether they understood him properly, tried again. "Your village is so beautiful!" Once more they replied, "Do you feel good in our village?" For them beauty was not fullness of artistry or perfection of lines. It was fullness of being and perfection of presence.

EPIC worship does not give up critical methods of understanding, but rather places them within a larger context of personal reality and experience. And while a worship methodology that is more Experiential, Participative, Imaged-based, and Communal may be classified as "postmodern," it's really nothing new. For Jesus, truth was not a matter of distant observations or scientifically tested theories. Rather, truth was revealed through our participation and interaction with him, others, and the world around us. The same approach rings true for worshippers in a postmodern age.

### Notes

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2. George Barna, "Teenagers and Their Relationships," *The Barna Report* (January-March 1999), 2.
3. *Tuesdays With Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Great Lesson* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 61.
4. Elaine Shepherd, *R.S. Thomas: Conceding an Absence* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 155.
5. As quoted in *Fast Company*, (November 1998), 108.
6. Michael J. Wolf, "The Pleasure Binge," *Wired* (March 1999), 86.
7. Spent annually on tourism worldwide: \$1.9 trillion. See Peter Weber, "It Comes Down to the Coasts," *World Watch* (March/April 1994), 21.
8. Wolf, "The Pleasure Binge," *Wired* (March 1999), 89.
9. Jane Miller, *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 151.
10. Southern Baptist pastor Jim L. Wilson uses this phrase in his as yet unpublished article on the "cyber-pastor."
11. Wolf, "The Pleasure Binge," *Wired* (March 1999), 90.
12. Pentecostalism boasts about twenty million new members a year, with especially large gains in Asia and Africa. Some Latin American countries are approaching Pentecostal majorities. Theologian Harvey Cox wrote his study of Pentecostalism not as an objective observer but as a participant. See Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995).
13. As quoted by D.J. Enright, *Interplay: A Kind of Commonplace Book* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1995), 152.
14. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 236-237.
15. For more on this, see my "Can You Hear the Double Ring?" *Vital Ministry*, 2 (March/April 1999), 34-37.
16. James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York, NY: Harper Business, 1994), 212-218.
17. Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 78.
18. George Barna, "Teenagers and Their Relationships," *The Barna Report* (January-March 1999), 3.
19. Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39 (September 1971), 291-311.
20. As quoted in Mark Amory, "Elegy and Regret." Review of John Betjeman, *Coming Home: An Anthology of His Prose, 1920-1977* (London: Methuen, 1997). *Times Literary Supplement* (November 12, 1997), 9.
21. Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988), 18.
22. Boomershine, *Story Journey*, 17.
23. Huston Smith in Marilyn Snell, "The World of Religion According to Huston Smith," *Mother Jones* (November/December 1997), 43.
24. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1961), 458.
25. Lorraine Code, "Who Cares? The Poverty of Objectivism for a Moral Epistemology," in "Rethinking Objectivity II," edited by Allan Megill, *Annals of Scholarship* 9:1-2 (1992), 7.
26. Fred Alan Wolf, *Taking the Quantum Leap: The New Physics for Non Scientists* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1981) and *Parallel Universes: The Search for Other Worlds* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988). See also David Bohm, "Imagination, Fancy, Insight and Reason in the Process of Thought" in *Evolution of Consciousness: Studies in Polarity*, edited by Shirley Sugerman (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 51-68.
27. John Wheeler, "The Universe as Home for Man," *American Scientist*, 62 (November 1974), 689.
28. Bryan Appleyard, *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), xvi.
29. Donald A. Norman, *Things That Make Us Smart: Defending Human Attributes in the Age of the Machine* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1993), 250.
30. See Rodney Brooks, *Intelligence Without Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, 1991). In Francisco J. Varela's words, "I am claiming that information—together with all of its closely related notions—has to be reinterpreted as codependent or constructive, in contradistinction to representational or instructive. This means, in other words, a shift from questions about semantic correspondence to questions about structural patterns." See his *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York, NY: North Holland, 1979), xv. Neni Panourgia's *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity: An Athenian Anthropography* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996) pioneers a new kind of anthropologist, the "communicative agent," which takes participant observation to the highest level and farthest limits.
31. Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* (New York, NY: W.H. Freeman, 1983), 203.
32. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston, MA: New Science Library, 1987), 9, 23.