

# the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

## TRANSLATING THE GOCN CONVERSATION TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Craig Van Gelder  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The First Annual Working Consultation of the Gospel and Our Culture Network was held on October 24-26, 1996 in Chicago. The topic was *The Postmodern Condition: Understanding the Gospel and Being Missionary Congregations.* As the designer and facilitator of this event, I was invited by George Hunsberger, editor of this newsletter, to serve as a guest editor for this edition. The content of this edition provides the reader with perspective on the presentations, discussions and experiences which various persons had who attended this event.

*The October event was designed to begin the process of bringing the GOCN conversation into more direct discussion with local congregations.*

There were over 40 persons in attendance at the working consultation which was a successor to four annual meetings of work groups. Almost half of these were pastors of local congregations. The other half were theological educators, denominational leaders, parachurch personnel and local church lay leaders. For several years, the Network has engaged in some very focused study, reflection, and writing regarding the issues of gospel, church and culture in the North American setting. The focus and intent of this event was to work on "translating the GOCN conversation to the ministry of the local church."

Many persons who have participated in previous consultations and conferences sponsored by the network have affirmed the critical importance of the GOCN conversation regarding the mission of the church in the changing North American context. They have stressed the importance of working out a missiological understanding of the nature and ministry of the church within the emerging postmodern

condition. But many of these same persons have observed that this conversation seemed to be either: (a) too conceptual; (b) too academic; or (c) not engaging of the issues and concerns facing local congregations.

The October event was designed to begin the process of bringing this conversation into more direct discussion with local congregations. The make-up of those attending the event was conducive to this. The design of the event, consisting of plenary presentations, small group discussions, and a case study on a local

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church, was also conducive to this. How well did it work? In this newsletter you will read the reports of four participants regarding their experiences in addressing this question.

Rev. Jody Rice, a newly ordained minister in the RCA, provides perspective on the process and content of the event itself, and notes the importance of being a relational community in shaping a response to the postmodern condition. Rev. Doug Ward, who serves as pastor of a Baptist Church in Canada, notes how the challenges facing the church within the emerging postmodern condition has invigorated his sense of mission and ministry. Dr. Meri McLeod, national ministry leader with The Navigators, by drawing on her background in educational theory identifies important characteristics of what a learning community needs to look like that is ministering within the postmodern condition. Dr. James Furr, a staff consultant with a large Southern Baptist association, critiques the value of a transformation process for local congregations which was presented at the consultation. In addition, the reader will find a short report from Dr. Alan Roxburgh on two recent seminar events in Canada that attempted to help pastors think through such a transformation process.

As the facilitator of this recent consultation, I would observe the following regarding the efforts the network is continuing to make to answer and address the issue of how to translate the GOCN conversation into the life of the local church.

*1. Need to Develop a Simplified Discussion of Complex Issues.*

Regardless of how the conversation is structured, it is clear that the underlying issues of developing a missiological understanding of the church in the emerging postmodern North American culture are very complex. While comprehensive knowledge of the development of Western culture and North American ecclesiology are not necessary to engage the conversation, a working familiarity with these developments is

foundational.

My reflection is that some participants in the conversation at the consultation still tended to make the conversation more complex than necessary, while others sought for simplifications which tended to end up being pragmatic solutions to fix the present system one more time. While the conversation can, and must be simplified to catch on with pastors and congregations, those engaging in the conversation will need to be committed to the discipline of careful conceptual discussion of the complex issues while also disciplining themselves to stay focused on the practical implications of these issues.

*2. Need to Develop a Strategic Process for a Missiological Discussion at the Congregational Level.*

It became clear in the discussion of the case study of a local church in the small groups that we are in need of

developing an applied methodology to assist local congregations to engage the missiological issues. There was a tendency on the part of some academics to shift discussion from the specifics of the case to analyzing the philosophical dimensions of the complex issues. There was a tendency on the part of some pastors and church leaders to affirm the reality of the case, but not see clear connections between the missiological issues and the realities of the case.

If the GOCN conversation is going to move forward in assisting local congregations to engage in a missiological discussion of the church in the postmodern culture it will be critical for the network to develop a strategic process for this to take place. Readers of this newsletter are invited to offer their contributions to this task as they read these materials and reflect on the experiences of various participants who were at the recent consultation. ■

## The Gospel and Our Culture Newsletter

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## A MODEL FOR THE POSTMODERN CHURCH

Jody Rice  
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To see friends again, to struggle together with what it means to be the people of God in this time and place, to pray with fellow faith journeyers, to worship and dream together, to be transformed, these were my experiences of the GOCN during the two days of gathering at the October working consultation. We spent a good deal of time "handling" a case study of an example church where we sought to find answers to the questions of how it might respond to its postmodern culture. We also explored how it might be faithful to the gospel as it bears witness to the reign of God in this type of context. From our discussions of the issues of the church and gospel in our culture, I personally developed some fresh perspectives on what the church might look like as it ministers in this type of world. The issues facing the church are complex. For myself, as a newly ordained pastor, they sometimes seem overwhelming. Yet the hard questions need to be asked and the complex issues need to be explored. The church, in fact, does appear to be in a crisis. I resonated with the comment of one plenary speaker who noted that the leader of a church in the postmodern context must not try to "go it alone," but rather must seek the fellowship of other leaders so that they can be shaped together. I was reassured of my own abilities to minister in the postmodern context when I heard other pastors, most who have been at this longer than I, state that they must not be alone in the journey of discovering what the church will be in the context of the emerging postmodern condition.

The plenary address by Alan Roxburgh made the point that the whole church is being shaped today by seeking after the "new and the next," rather than asking the more fundamental question, "What does it

mean to be apostolic?" If we are indeed a people who are sent by God on a mission in the world, then we must be true to our beginnings and know our source. It is more important that we return to our roots in the historic Christian faith than to seek after managerial solutions and new techniques for ministry.

Some time was spent reflecting on our "beginnings" in the experiences which Israel had at the time of the exile and during the post-exilic period. Leaders in the church have a similar responsibility today as the prophets who spoke to God's people in that time, to assist God's people in understanding what it means to be dislocated within one's culture. Those leaders reminded God's people that they were to live and relate to one another as a community in order to be true to their calling. Critical to this process of being a community at that

*Today we are in need of recognizing something of our brokenness.*

time was recognizing their own brokenness. Today, we are in need of recognizing something of our brokenness. And just as those leaders called on God to accomplish his purposes, so leaders in the church today must be able to translate the mission of God in the world into a specific vision for ministry within the postmodern context.

One of the plenary sessions incorporated a series of clips from contemporary movies as a method for helping us understand the pervasiveness of the postmodern condition. I was reminded again of the desire so many postmodern persons have in wanting to experience the spiritual, yet how totally lacking they are of any understanding of the language and symbols of the Christian tradition. There are many spiritual pathways which are considered truthful by the

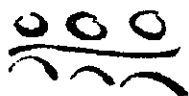
postmodern mind. This poses a dilemma for the church that is seeking to be faithful to living out the historic Christian faith. Yet, it also presents an opportunity because the postmodern mind is sensitive to having a conversation about spiritual matters.

The question for the church becomes, "How do we hear, believe, live, and announce the Gospel in such a way that we are faithful in our particular context?" The presentation by Jim Brownson helped us to at least frame these issues in some concrete terms. Hearing the gospel on its own terms compels the church to take a long look at the incarnation of Christ, where what became human was "full of grace and truth." We must recognize that the church now humanly embodies the spiritual reality of this same "grace and truth." The gospel informs us that God's grace disarms all bids for power that seek to control and God's truth unmasks all pretense that seeks to delude. The issues of power and pretense are two things which the church in the postmodern condition must understand. The pretentiousness of the pastor who seeks to become a powerful manager of a congregation violates the character of the gospel. Repentance will be critical to our capacity to hear the gospel on its own terms.

As we struggle with the issues of power in the church, we are assured that God's "will to love" transcends the "will to power" because God's love endures longer. God's steadfast love insures that the will to power will not have the last word. The question for us is, "Are we willing to live this way?" Are we willing to risk the "will to love"? This can only be realized through the power of the Spirit. But inherent in being faithful to the gospel and living by the Spirit is the willingness to suffer. That is why the critique of the postmodern culture is often most insightful when it comes from those who have suffered from the experience of living on the underside or being on the outside of dominant culture.

As a woman who is ordained to ministry, I can relate to issues of

power, marginality, and suffering. However, my experiences at the consultation were affirming that there is room at the table for all who seriously seek the Lord. We are all struggling with these issues. At times some of us can get lost in the critique and conversation. Yet, in the midst of all of this, there is the reality of community, a community which God is using to continue to transform my understanding of and relationship to Him. The GOCN process and conversation is ongoing. It is my expectation that those who participate will continue to be shaped as a people of God within the postmodern context, a people where God's presence will continue to be experienced as it was experienced in the consultation in October. ■



## **WHY THE POSTMODERN CONDITION EXCITES ME: A Pastoral View**

*Doug Ward  
Kanata, Ontario*

Who makes a pastor? The church, the people, the tradition, the call of God, or all of the above? In moments of erudition, perceived success, or endorphin-crazed excess, I can easily fall subject to believing that it has been years of training, the result of hard work and a bit of good fortune. The truth is much different. With the benefit of hindsight and fresh spiritual eyes, it is clear that it is God who makes pastors and chooses people to follow the calling of God to stand in the gap as they engage ministry.

Being a pastor is one of the gifts of the Spirit to the church. The price is high, but the gift is worth more than can be offered by any human agency. "It is he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, an some to be pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). The

call to be a pastor keeps me on track in ministry. It places me in the way of people. In their way, I find myself mediating the word of God, bearing with the failures of many, and announcing the good news of forgiveness. Most of us who have been called to be pastors, if we are honest,

*But the church has also lost the ability to speak in a language that the culture will recognize as legitimate and incisive.*

struggle with the call of God. Sometimes we glory in it. Sometimes we try to shake it off. And sometimes we suffer because of it. Our desire is to celebrate what the Spirit of God is doing in our midst and engage fully with the world. The glory of it all!

In the past ten years, I have bounced off the walls of being inundated with information from the various challenges to the church regarding pursuing church growth, enabling and equipping members, developing a meta-church, forming cell groupings, engaging in social engineering, trying charismatic searching, and attempting seeker marketing. For too many of us, such trend-driven Christianity and church-management techniques are the air we breathe. It is the stuff with which we interpret the world while attempting to discover new vehicles to give the gospel a fresh face or some new type of impact. However, the culture is passing us by like a train which is out of control. We must learn to let the culture critique the church as much as we critique the culture.

In short, I found the discussion at the October consultation around the theme of the postmodern condition to be refreshing and bracing. It allowed me to take an unabashed look at the thought and passions of the world, which in turn opened up new light on understanding the church as the body of Christ. It blew some doors off of what had become hardened agendas in my intellectual framework, and

woke me up to the plight now facing many local congregations and pastors.

I found the postmodern discussion to be invigorating for pastors and leaders of local congregations for the following reasons:

1. We need to have an underlying mental picture that accurately reflects

and addresses the reality of how our culture views itself.

2. We need to develop a responsible rubric that meets this world view head on with credible enthusiasm and truth.

3. We need to draw a tight connection between the relevance of the gospel message and the hunger in the hearts of people; and in this process learn to speak a new language.

4. We need to reengage the church's teaching ministry, moving from a propositional mode of truth telling to a form of communal engagement with the stated claims of the culture.

5. We need to engage our culture with a fresh epistemology that takes its direction from the agenda of the culture, not to become accommodated to it, but to connect with it, and even to bring transformation to it.

The culture in which we are swimming has lost the narrative to carry forward an intelligible discourse into the uncertainties of tomorrow. But the church has also lost the ability to speak in a language that the culture will recognize as legitimate and incisive.

We do not possess the gospel. The gospel possesses us. In so doing, God sets us on a new course of communal living that embraces the world with integrity. The fragmentation and brokenness that give definition to the world's agenda are met with the ferocity of the healing of God that confronts it with tough minded love. The multiple world views of the postmodern condition that are seen as equally right are taken apart by a fresh rhetoric that

calls them out for what they are—being fuzzy minded. The ever changing future celebrated as the newly-minted man ready to throw off the shackles of the past is exposed for what it is—the rejection of our creation in Christ.

God is doing a new thing. Why are we afraid of the big, bad world? Does it threaten and intimidate us? Perhaps it is too difficult and painful to understand. But God is already working in the culture. As we prepare ourselves to understand culture on its own terms, we find the tables reversed as the power of God engages and uncovers areas of vulnerability and weakness. It may not surface in immediate discourse, but hearts will break and minds will soften as the Spirit sows the seed.

As one of my favorite authors, Philip Yancey in his book *Finding God in Unexpected Places* puts it:

God does not limit himself to the four walls of a sanctuary. Jesus himself looked for God not among the pious at the synagogue, but in a widow who had two pennies left to her name and in a tax collector who knew no formal prayers; he found his spiritual lessons in sparrows sold at a market, and in wheat fields and wedding banquets, and yes, even in the observations of a half-breed foreigner with five failed marriages. Jesus was a master at finding God in unexpected places.... John S. Dunne tells of early Spanish sailors who reached the continent of South America after an arduous voyage. The caravel sailed into the headwaters of the Amazon, an expanse of water so wide the sailors presumed it to be a continuation of the Atlantic Ocean. It never occurred to them to drink the water, since they expected it to be saline, and as a result some of these sailors died of thirst. That scene of men dying of thirst even as their ships floated on the world's largest source of fresh water has

become a metaphor for our age.

May we not be afraid to dip our ladles deep into the mind and heart of our world and see that God has preceded us. ■



## **EQUIPPING THE CHURCH FOR INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY: Reflections of an Educator**

*Meri McLeod*  
*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

As a leader and educator, I continually wrestle with the challenges of developing a ministry shaped by missiological understandings. Not only does this challenge the way ministry is understood, it also challenges the way believers are equipped to participate in the mission. Effectively equipping men and women for ministry in a pluralistic world suggests a re-examination of common approaches and their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. New models are slowly emerging that seek to teach the values of dialogue: (a) listening without needing to correct, and (b) learning through community. Many popular models for teaching and learning unknowingly undermine these values through implicit educational designs which draw heavily from the schooling approach.

### ***The Challenge of Equipping.***

Most educational approaches used by the church are inadequate, owing largely to their uncritical adoption of the formal schooling model as their primary strategy for teaching and equipping. Examples abound in which training courses, conferences and

seminars teach evangelism primarily by giving lots of information. Educational research has documented that the most lasting impact of school learning is not the facts accumulated on the subject (explicit curriculum), but the lessons learned by what is experienced in the social settings of these schools (implicit curriculum). (See e.g. Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1984; or Lightfoot, Sara Lawrence. *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*. Basic Books, New York, 1983.) Gaining an understanding of how beliefs, values and social norms are taught implicitly through particular educational approaches is essential. Creating new approaches that communicate congruent values through the explicit and implicit (hidden) curriculum will be an important step in nurturing others to live out an incarnational gospel.

The school is a powerful social institution. Research by a growing number of educators exposes the tremendous socializing power of the school and the troubling nature of the beliefs, values and social norms taught through its hidden curriculum. (See e.g. Giroux, Henry A. *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life*. Bergin and Garvey, New York, 1989.) Schools teach lasting lessons regarding the nature of relationships, the nature of knowledge, and the kinds of people who are winners, or losers. These same lessons are often taught through the hidden curriculum of an educational design that is uncritically embraced by churches, mission agencies, ministry organizations and Christian schools. These are lessons that stand in stark contrast to what we see modeled by Jesus.

Though the church may hold to the conviction that it is a community of believers, it often unknowingly embraces an educational design that teaches and reinforces deeply rooted lessons of individualism, self-sufficiency, and that being right, where beating out the other person, is the appropriate way to live. It is no mistake that many seminaries anguish

over their limited ability to foster meaningful community. An educational design rooted in the value of competition, with its accompanying effects of mistrust and fear, is not conducive to or compatible with what is required for developing real community.

### *Hidden Lessons of Schools*

Schools leave us with profound

be broken down into component parts. In this contest, truth and knowing become something we can control. In fact, achieving control of knowledge is seen as the way to become successful at learning. Learning becomes a mechanistic task that involves gaining and giving the right information. Knowledge is primarily acquired from experts (teachers), whose primary job is to dispense the right information.

teach the values of dialogue and community. (See e.g. Mezirow, Jack. "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education," in *Adult Education*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1984, pp. 3-24; and Mezirow, Jack and Associates. *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1991.)

Although these trends appear to

*Pluralism and diversity challenge the church to be willing to dialogue, and to be able to listen without always needing to correct or give the right answer.*

lessons in at least two critical areas: (1) the nature of the social context for learning, and later, for living in society; and (2) the nature of knowledge. Schools teach us, first of all, that learning (and living) is primarily an individual experience based on successfully competing against others for knowledge and the use of limited resources. Most social interaction is infused with the undercurrent of competition as a social norm leading to the hidden by-products of fear and mistrust. Students compete for affirmation, esteem, and successful achievement of the knowledge tasks. Competition also teaches that it is desirable to have winners and losers. Fear of failure becomes a hidden reality that carries into adulthood. As schools stratify students into homogenous groupings, we learn that our most meaningful relationships are with those who are like us. We learn untold lessons about the place of minorities and those who are different. (See e.g. Lee, John D. *Ethnic Minorities and Evangelical Christian Colleges*. University Press of America: Lanham, Maryland, 1991.) Sadly, many of these social lessons are mirrored in the church.

Secondly, schools teach us that knowledge is rational, linear and can

Learning rarely involves raising questions to which there is no apparent answer. Questions are primarily asked to gain clarification or additional information and are rarely asked of others participating in the experience. Learning does not mean living with unanswered questions, or being content with ambiguity, or welcoming paradox. It is not a process, but is rather an act of gaining the correct information.

### *Emerging New Models*

These two messages infuse the vast majority of teaching and equipping that is conducted by the church. This raises troubling concerns when we look at the task of the church to equip Christians for meaningful involvement in a pluralistic, postmodern world. Outside the church, there is a growing critique of the faulty and unjust lessons being taught through the hidden curriculum of schools. Influential thinkers such as Michael Polanyi and Jurgen Habermas have made important contributions to an expanded understanding of the nature of knowledge. In addition, research on the nature of adult theories of learning that focus on perspective transformation are also forging new models of educational experience that seek to

have a somewhat limited impact on the church, there are signs of new models both in Christian schools and ministry. These models are characterized by the following principles. First, there is a high value on community. Intentional steps are being taken to reduce the subtle forms of competition and increase the opportunities for establishing meaningful relationships. Second, simply acquiring information is being de-emphasized and opportunities to integrate information with real life are being offered. Third, new models see the teacher as a skilled "leading-learner," not the sole expert or resource of knowledge. Carefully planned steps are taken to enable everyone to contribute to the learning process. Fourth, these models stress that learning as an ongoing process of development, not simply an event.

Pluralism and diversity challenge the church to be willing to dialogue, and to be able to listen without always needing to correct or give the right answer. Learning to be a true community of learners will demand a new understanding of what it means to teach and learn. For the church to be able to meaningfully communicate the gospel in a postmodern world, this will mean rethinking the approaches it takes to teaching and equipping. ■

## TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONS

James Furr,  
Houston, Texas

During the October GOCN consultation we were presented with the challenge that we as leaders in the church are called to be involved with God in the transformation of local congregations. A process model was presented for our review which identified that the wellspring of this transformation work is our Redeemer, but where church leaders have the responsibility to serve as faithful and effective catalysts for change. There were three dimensions developed in this model which serve as a framework for an applied missiology for a church transformation process. In this brief article, it will be my purpose to identify these dimensions and offer some reflections on their usefulness in helping congregations address the emerging postmodern condition.

### *The Missiological Question*

The first question which needs to be asked is, "What is God doing in our specific context?" Answering this question helps the congregation connect with its community. If we believe that God is active in the lives of individuals, groups and organizations in our communities, we must become specifically aware of how this is so. We are, in fact, promised that the Holy Spirit will enable us to discern both the brokenness perpetrated by the fallen powers as well as the redeeming activity of God in our context. Evidences of this discerning in the postmodern condition often involves celebrating those life-changing experiences of healing and hope among individuals who were once characterized by brokenness and despair, and of communities experiencing understanding and reconciliation that were once characterized by fragmentation and oppression.

### *The Ecclesiological Question*

The second question which needs to be asked is, "What is God doing in the midst of our particular congregation?" Answering this question helps a congregation move intentionally into the path of God's transforming activity. In the emerging postmodern condition, there are several ecclesiological dimensions that demonstrate when transformation is occurring: (1) when a church is "converted" from a superficial voluntary association to a deeply bound "covenantal" community with real accountability and a shared, compelling vision for its life and ministry; (2) when the organizational culture of a congregation affirms diversity as a gift of God rather than a mere source of conflict or a problem to be solved; and (3) when leadership transcends the secular model of "command and control" to leadership based on trust, service and personal integrity.

### *The Organizational Question*

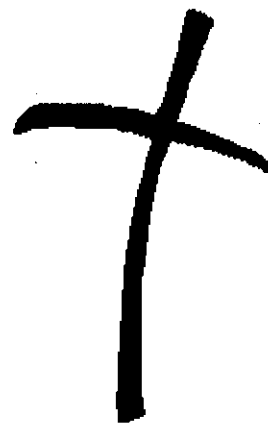
The third question which needs to be asked is, "How can we lead our church to experience transformation?" Answering this question addresses the "process" of how various persons and/or leaders might intervene into the life of a congregation. Entry points may include: (a) the pastor through preaching, appointing a task force, re-tooling or even resigning; (b) lay leaders by exerting influence through the governing board or through building partnerships with the pastor; (c) denominational officials through providing continuing education, conflict management consultations, or by assisting a congregation in calling a new pastor; and (d) outside consultants and/or para-church personnel by offering various consultative, training and material resources.

In terms of the transformation process, catalytic intervention can focus initially in trying to answer any one of these three questions. Comprehensive change, however, must eventually engage the entire system

from all three perspectives. The danger to watch for is that entering on the organizational level can oftentimes turn to efforts to find pragmatic solutions which have not addressed the fundamental issues of context and church identity.

I found this model for framing a transformation process useful in highlighting a major challenge facing leaders today who seek to introduce change while displaying confessional confidence. We are to be bold in our faithfulness because we serve as "salt and light" in our cultural context. But we are also to live as "contrasting communities" known for our humility because our penchant to sin often distorts our distinctiveness.

In an environment in which blitzkrieg transitions are now exploding the embedded traditions of many congregations, church leaders can easily become overwhelmed. The good news for church leaders working in the context of the postmodern condition is that interventions for church transformation that are rooted in confessional confidence offer us two things. They express the decisiveness required for acting in tumultuous settings. And they affirm the holiness that points beyond ourselves to the true Source of transformation. ■



# GOCN DEVELOPS REGIONAL EVENTS

Alan Roxburgh  
West Vancouver, BC

One of the primary vehicles for carrying forward the GOCN conversation has been our annual consultations held in the fall of each year. These have enabled a wide variety of church leaders to gather and share with one another the fruits of their own engagements in developing a missionary ecclesiology for our context. Since the bi-national GOCN conference held last March in Chicago, there has been a growing interest in moving this type of conversation into various regions across North America, and to engage more directly those ministering at the grass roots level in local churches.

As the network has developed a body of literature and continues to produce a number of publications, we have been able to develop content and learning processes that introduce new persons to the GOCN conversation. Out of a number of requests and our own desire to extend this conversation among church leaders unable to attend bi-national meetings, we have developed a seminar for regional gatherings.

The first two regional seminars were held in November in Vancouver and in January in Toronto. The continued emergence of the postmodern condition in the Canadian context heightened the focus of the conversation. These seminars were led by Alan Roxburgh and Craig Van Gelder. Under the title, "Learning to Color Outside the Lines," each event drew people from a cross-section of churches and leadership groups. The seminar consisted of a series of presentations interwoven with small group discussions.

Both events demonstrated a high level of interest in the GOCN agenda. As we moved through the materials, it was evident that people were making connection with the issues and developing fresh insights into understanding their ministries. Some of the specific learnings which we developed from conducting these events are the following:

1. Naming the Shift in Culture—Participants consistently found it helpful to use the framework and characteristics of the emerging postmodern condition to identify what was happening in the communities which they serve.
2. Identifying the Power of the Gospel—Participants consistently responded to rediscovering the power inherent in the biblical presentation of the gospel, especially as the fuller reality of God's redemptive reign (the Kingdom of God) was discussed.
3. Rediscovering the Church—Participants were especially responsive to digging into issues of ecclesiology

both from biblical perspectives and from the context of the history of the church.

4. **Owning Up to the Responsibility of Leadership**—Participants were appreciative of the challenge placed before them to engage, to risk, to explore, and to suffer, if necessary, in bringing leadership to their congregations.

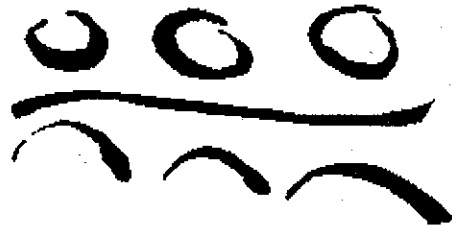
5. **Recognizing the Diversity of Churches**—Participants were surprised at the commonness of the issues confronting congregations today, but also noted the complexity of the diverse denominational traditions and structures which make up the church in North America.

6. **Discovering the Value of Community**—Participants enjoyed the opportunity to engage in some serious discussion and honest story telling with friends and colleagues. Those churches which sent groups of leaders to the events found this journey into community especially helpful as they reflected on how to take the conversation back to their own local congregation.

It was clear to the two of us who led these events that the process used in this seminar has great potential for beginning the task of helping local congregations discover afresh the missionary nature of the church. Our experiences in Vancouver and Toronto indicate to us that this implementation of the GOCN conversation at the local level in regional settings was scratching where church leaders are itching.

If you have interest in coordinating and promoting such an event in the area where you live, please contact:

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# NETWORKINGS...

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE EMERGING POSTMODERN CONDITION**

During the working consultation in October, Dr. James Furr set up his laptop and invited participants to make bibliographic entries regarding published materials relating to the postmodern discussion. These entries, along with those provided by the plenary speakers, was edited and published by the GOCN office. A copy of this bibliography, "Resources For and From GOCN Consultation Participants," may be secured by requesting such from Judy Bos in the GOCN office.

## **THE CHURCH BETWEEN GOSPEL AND CULTURE**

The network was recently informed that this volume of essays by contributors to the GOCN conversation received special recognition from the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, a missiology journal published by the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. The January 1997 issue of this journal includes this book in the editor's selection of the "Fifteen Outstanding Books of 1996 for Mission Studies."

In addition, the network was recently informed by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, which published the book, that over 2200 copies have been sold during the first nine months. This represents a strong sales figure for this type of volume. Eerdmans is planning on a second printing sometime during the summer of 1997.

It will be helpful to the GOCN Coordinators to know the various uses to which this book (*The Church Between Gospel and Culture*) is being put. Are you using it in a discussion group? Sharing it among a circle of friends? Using it as a text in a course?

And if so, what are the responses people have to it? What sorts of observations or questions does it surface? Does it help people clarify the direction in which the church needs to move? If so, what other help do they seem to need in order to be able to move themselves and others along in that direction?

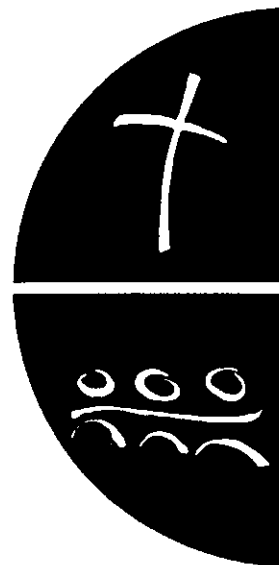
Please share both the effects and the limits of the book by sending to George Hunsberger a brief note, a study guide you may have used, a syllabus for a course that uses the book, or anything else that might help the Coordinators

## **GOCN ONLINE**

A GOCN website has been developed and is now online! It can be found at URL <http://www.gocn.org> and it includes basic information about the nature of the network and ways to connect with it.

The site is a beginning one, and development will continue in order to enhance its usefulness. Members of the network who have surfed among websites will likely have suggestions about what would be most helpful to include on the site and how to make it most user-friendly. You may share your ideas and wishes by dropping an email message to [gocn@gocn.org](mailto:gocn@gocn.org).

The GOCN listserve continues to be a place for electronic mail discussion of "gospel and our culture" issues. The listserve is now a moderated one to ensure that the focus of the discussion stays on course and a vigorous exchange of opinion and perspective can take place. To sign on, send in the body of an email message the phrase "subscribe gocn" and address the message to [majordomo@calvin.edu](mailto:majordomo@calvin.edu).



**LETTER TO THE EDITOR****CAMPUS MINISTRY AS A "LAB" OF THE CHURCH**

Bill Van Groningen  
Kingston, Ontario

A campus minister myself, I was particularly intrigued with the essay of Coleen Smith Slosberg, "When Death is Life: Campus Ministry as a Laboratory for the Local Church" (GOC Newsletter, September 1996). I was especially intrigued since I have also, at times, found it helpful to think of campus ministry as one of the possible "labs" for exploring how best to pursue the mission of the church.

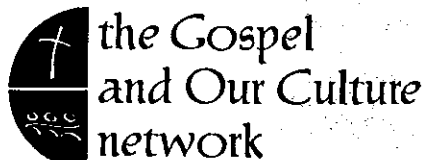
In the end, however, I was disappointed with the direction of Ms. Slosberg's reflections/practise. Granted, it is better to "be the church in the midst of campus" than merely to rest comfortably at home "in the (institutional) church." My difficulty lies in the polarity of these options.

Slosberg writes: "We may never again have a worshiping community of more than twenty.... But we have claimed

a new vision of ourselves as the church: we are the salt, we are the yeast, the campus is the dough." I rejoice to hear that the service (salt/yeast) of her Campus Ministry is now spread throughout the campus. But I can't help but wonder if the salt has lost (some of) its saltiness if all that results is involving others, (al)most all of whom have no desire to be gathered in worship. If this way of ministry (service) is to function as a new "test of being the church," shouldn't it still meet the biblical injunctions of Hebrews 10:25 ("Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..."), Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, etc.?

Didn't the Apostles scatter across the world, establishing communities of believers who were the church in the world (to be sure) but who likewise gathered regularly for prayer, instruction, preaching, offerings, and all those other (institutionally) churchly things? Doesn't effective salt/yeast, when scattered throughout the dough, through the mystery of divine providence have an effect that yields a return beyond itself? Isn't our mission intended likewise to gather the multitudes into *both* service in the world *and* the service of prayer, praise, preaching and the like within the church?

Just wondering...a lot. ■



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