

Mike Rydell: Beyond Ground Zero: Resourcing Faith in a Post-Christian Era

Introduction

It is perhaps too close in time to consider the way in which the events of September 11 2001 have changed the world. But already the effects have created seismic ripples in geopolitics, interfaith relationships, international security and possibly the entire progress of Western culture. As a symbol, the terrible yet fascinating image of the twin towers collapsing is magnificently evocative. In the space of a few hours, the economic supremacy of the United States was reduced to so much rubble. That which seemed unassailable is now perceived to be vulnerable and fragile. The current debate is over what to put in place of the World Trade Centre as a fitting memorial. Interestingly enough, none of the frontline proposals suggest rebuilding the towers. Ground Zero demands humility rather than swagger.

One of the popular artefacts of Ground Zero has been the so-called I-beam cross. Originally a cruciform piece of steel which fell from the sky and impaled itself amidst the debris of destruction, it was transformed into an icon of devotion. The sight of this inescapably Christian symbol in the heart of America's ruins has an arresting and possibly portentous connotation. To Western theologians, it might be taken as the tomb marker of that powerful mixture of faith and hegemony which has dominated the world as part of the Western project. It is not only the towers of commerce which have fallen; Christendom and even Christianity itself have been levelled to the ground in those nations which were once the champions of the faith.¹ It was not airborne terror which brought about the collapse, but rather the slow erosion of the foundations by a persistent tide. Is it time to consider what sort of fitting memorial we might construct for the religion which considered itself the end of religion? Shall we pronounce the benediction and turn out the lights?

As Twain would have it, rumours of demise might be premature. While current challenges to the Christian enterprise are as serious as any it has faced in its two millennia of history, the movement has shown a dogged and sometimes dangerous capacity for survival. The more likely scenario is for another mutation which enables the faith to survive in a nominally post-Christian era. The task of this paper, after briefly surveying the difficulties of Christianity in the West, is to make some suggestions as to the future incarnation of the movement of Jesus in that place; and to propose new ways of resourcing what might be a very different sort of church. You might consider this as a submission for what to do with the space which has become Christendom's Ground Zero. That project also requires humility rather than swagger.

The Collapse of Christian Certainty

It might have been the terrifyingly beautiful sight of aeroplanes smashing into the twin towers which first caught our attention, but I suspect it was the collapse of those mighty structures which was the more symbolically enduring. At one level it seemed to prove that the box-cutter is mightier than the Cruise missile. It took a little reflection to recognise that the forces unleashed on that day had been quietly fermenting for several decades. The collapse may have been dramatic, but the malevolent energy which caused it was brewed over time in the vats of American foreign policy and abuse of power.

The collapse of Christianity in the West has been no less dramatic in our times, and the forces which caused it no less carefully fermented by history.² The United States of America is an

innocent in the manipulation of power when compared to the historic institution of the church. Centuries of religious hegemony have had consequences. It is in our generation that all Christendom's vultures have come home to roost. As we contemplate the beginning of a millennium which has already been labelled as post-Christian, those stunned survivors of the demolition can only attempt to sift through the rubble in the hope of clues to such devastation. As it happens, they are not hard to find. It is simply that, like many good-natured Americans, Western Christians could not contemplate the forces which were gathering against them until it was too late. The collapse of one's tower does have the ability to demand attention.

The World Trade Centre would not have fallen were it not for the fact that the superstructure failed. As a consequence, the weight that it was carrying could no longer be supported, and the whole building crumpled under its own load. There is a parallel here, I suggest, with the fate of Christianity in the West. The conceptual superstructure of the enterprise has been weakened over centuries, until eventually the inevitable fall came. I have no polemical interest in stating this as an occurrence *post factum*. Those who wish to argue that the Emperor is still clothed in sartorial elegance will need to find someone prepared to debate the issue. Nor do I wish to linger on the evidence or the causes for what is, I suspect, the reason why such a conference as this one has been entertained. If the future of Christianity were not in doubt, we would likely not be discussing it. My interest, however, is not in what has been destroyed, but in what might be rescued or rebuilt.

Back in 1982, David Barrett suggested that 53,000 patrons were leaving church in North America and Europe and not coming back.³ Peter Brierley warns that some denominations will disappear entirely in England this century on current trends.⁴ He estimates that church attendance in Britain has fallen from 18% to 7.5% over the last 50 years. Callum Brown in his book *The Death of Christian Britain* draws on a variety of statistics to contemplate the unthinkable: the end of the church in the United Kingdom.⁵ Kevin Ward paints a similar picture in New Zealand, where he estimates that church attendance has halved since 1960.⁶ These are mere indicators of what is now a universal trend within Western Christianity; the rapid numerical decline of the church. I have described it elsewhere as a 'haemorrhage' which threatens to bleed the enterprise to death.⁷ Brown argues powerfully that 'it is not acceptable - logically - to continue perceiving Britain's (or any other country's) principal religion as "in decline" without conceptualising where the decline is heading (or has already arrived).'⁸

It is not only numerical decline which Christianity faces, however; even more disconcerting may be the loss of influence and authority which it once enjoyed.⁹ This may be less quantifiable but is no less keenly felt. Where should we look for the explanation of Christianity's demise? There is no simple answer, but a rounding up of the usual suspects does give us some insight. Modernity's romance with reason was in itself an act of resistance against the dominion of the church, and the rise of science inevitably cast doubt on claims which might be authoritative but were never going to be verifiable. The great wave of colonial expansion which appeared to establish the supremacy of both Western commerce and Christianity, in fact introduced a persistent creeping pluralism which eventually flowered as relativism through encounter with diverse cultural verities.¹⁰ Post-colonial assertiveness subverted the limitless confidence of nineteenth century mission, causing a ripple of self-doubt which continues to flow through historic centres of Christianity.

It is however to the last half of the twentieth century that we must look to see the fatal impact which has reduced the towers of Western cultural and religious supremacy to so much rubble. That crisis at the heart of modernity which has attracted the title of postmodernity is the irresistible force responsible for undermining the Christian project. Various components of the revolution might be highlighted - the demise of textuality, the incredulity toward metanarratives, the suspicion of institutions, the resistance to authority, the liberation of subjectivity, the embrace of

difference - as contributing to the fall of what seemed invulnerable. But all of these are expressions in one form or another of a clear recognition of the associations between discourse and power. And with that awareness has come an almost universal insight into the totalising nature of Western religious domination through the vehicle of Christianity.

The epitaph of this project of Christendom might be encapsulated in one word - 'abuse'. The historical abuse through authoritarian sanction, hierarchical domination, theological imperialism, financial exploitation and patriarchal capture has been mirrored in contemporary revelations of sexual abuse, paedophilia, fraud, moral failure and corruption on the part of clergy. ¹¹ Those who once looked to the church as the guardians of their faith have come to see themselves as victims of an ecclesial regime which has suppressed their experience, intuitions, intellectual freedom and ultimately their spiritual growth.¹² While, ironically, a new era has dawned in which meaning and faith have been rescued from the industrial waste dumps of modernity, it should not be surprising that those who pursue it are no longer looking to the church to guide them. The times are definitively post-Christian.

It is against that backdrop of a rather literal deconstruction that I come to the substantial task of this paper; to look at ways in which the Western Christian movement might adopt new modes of being as it makes its way into unknown territory.

Rethinking the Faith

Clearly, for the Western church to adopt a 'more of the same' attitude in the current context is to consign itself to enduring oblivion, with only the equivalent of an I-beam cross to mark the gap in history it once occupied. Responses thus far to the gathering crisis seem to fall into one of three categories.

(a) Blind Ignorance

There remains enough institutional impetus to allow some sections of the church to fain ignorance of any problem with the indomitable passage through time of the great ship *Ecclesia*.¹³ Those in the well-appointed cabins of the ship's stateroom continue to dine well and remain oblivious to any threat to the vessel's progress. Their only instruction is to hold the rudder steady. A variation on this theme is that of fundamentalism. This however is not so much uninformed as wilful disregard of the outside world. In response to the clamour of the barbarians outside the gate, the fundamentalists take refuge in eternal revelation. Either scripture or the rapture will save them from any meaningful confrontation with the outside world, which they have already happily consigned to hell. They will make their way to heaven whichever way the wind blows.

(b) Revival

Some recognise that things are not quite what they once were, but can't bring themselves to believe that God will abandon them in their hour of need. Surely some great divine act will turn the tables and restore the faithful to their rightful station at the head of the table.¹⁴ The infidels will be defeated, the people will flood into the churches again, and we will look back on these dark days as a time of temptation. The answer will come not from within the church but from the intervening work of God. There are many variations on this theme, including the charismatic movement, the house church venture, the Toronto blessing, Pensacola and the Prayer of Jabez¹⁵ coalition - a veritable Disneyland of religious movements which illustrate perfectly the main tenets of postmodernity.¹⁶ The consensus is that although the church needs to change, those within it don't need to do anything to make it happen.

(c) Reform

More astute observers call for reform of the church to respond to a perceived threat. The less adventurous exponents of this option become preoccupied with activity which is akin to rearranging the deck chairs on a certain ship which prided itself on being unsinkable. There are calls for structural reform, liturgical reform and theological reform. Policy revisions are suggested in areas as diverse as pastoral practice, church polity, public relations and church architecture. The common element in these proposals is an underlying confidence that whatever changes might be required, the vessel itself is seaworthy.¹⁷ But if my analysis is correct, that assumption is no longer able to be upheld. A hole below the waterline subverts all attempts to improve onboard conditions.

None of the three strategies is adequate to the new era. What is called for is an act of radical re-imagining of the sort provided by a Jeremiah or Deutero-Isaiah, who are forced to reconceptualise faith in a setting beyond which has previously been known. Beyond Ground Zero lies new and previously unexplored territory, for which past experience provides resources but not solutions. The only hopeful strategy is that which Brueggemann has called *The Prophetic Imagination*.¹⁸ The first task of such an approach is the tragic acceptance that 'the end of the royal fantasy is very near'.¹⁹ In other words, the starting point of any meaningful reform of the Western church is acknowledgement of its impending death.²⁰ Only then is the imagination free to explore previously unvisited possibilities.

All at Sea

Leonard Sweet, one of the few American church commentators to take culture change seriously, has provided a useful metaphor for the sort of transition which is forced upon Western Christianity in the present era. He describes modernity as a landlocked age dominated by the linearity of maps, whereas:

...the Postmodern Era is a rage for chaos, uncertainty, otherness, openness, multiplicity and change. Postmodern surfaces are not landscapes but wavescapes, with the waters always changing and the surface never the same. The sea knows no boundaries.²¹

Elements of Sweet's analysis are consistent with Zygmunt Baumann's categorisation of the cultural shift between 'solid' or 'heavy' modernity and the new situation of 'liquid modernity'.²² Solid modernity, in his view, while to a certain extent melting the traditions of an earlier feudal age, produced a new stable order in which production, plant, expansion, boundaries, norms and rules provided rational structure. Liquid modernity (postmodernity by another name), means that consumption has replaced production, transferable skills are valued over plant, norms are subverted by change and flexibility, and identity is constructed on a different basis from gender or class.

Significantly, Baumann characterises the new fluid modernity as an arena where the construction of identity is individualised.²³ Social matrices, 'natural' communities, vocational networks and class collectives are all effectively dissolved as preservatives of identity, forcing individuals to look elsewhere. Baumann notes the practical role of 'peg', 'cloakroom', and 'carnival' communities in providing alternative means of bolstering security. Peg communities are those constituted around events or interests which provide a temporally limited focus.²⁴ Cloakroom communities allow for the construction of a stylised identity for a certain occasion, and carnival communities involve the provision of a temporary though entertaining centre of belonging.²⁵ These liquid and flexible constructs of identity are contrasted with what Bauman terms 'ethical communities', which go beyond the illusion of mutual responsibility by requiring long term commitments, and in turn offering inalienable rights and a planned future.

The major significance of Bauman's insights is his recognition that much of what has previously been solid in the construction of social identity and belonging is now dissolved into an endless sea of terrifying possibility. Can human habits of association and belonging shift so substantially without it affecting the community of Christ? Pete Ward, in his soon to be published book, *Liquid Church*,²⁶ thinks not. He draws on Bauman to paint an evocative distinction between solid church and liquid church. He characterises solid church (the child of modernity) as plant-based, needs-defining, centralised, inflexible, authoritarian and boundary-obsessed. The entire enterprise, whether traditional institutional or free church Charismatic, demands obedience, formalised association, hierarchy and defined limits. It is 'heavy' church in multiple senses of the word, requiring intense resource expenditure to maintain and extracting costly allegiance from its participants.

Ward advocates the possibility of liquid church, and sees signs of its emergence around the edges of the establishment. By this he means a way of existence as followers of Christ which allows for flow and flexibility, which enables the construction of Christian identity outside of formal structures, which gives reign to spiritual desire rather than manufacturing need and which invites participation instead of policing boundaries. In what is perhaps the most controversial part of his thesis, he agrees with Bauman that shopping is the fundamental metaphor for identity formation in the present world, and suggests that church might be usefully informed by the paradigm of shopping.

Liquid Church would reshape itself around worshippers as consumers. Spiritual life would recognise that shopping is the natural way of interaction with all aspects of life including the spiritual. A fluid Church would abandon congregational structures in favour of a varied and changing diet of worship, prayer, study and activity. The assumption that what we offer in our morning service may be boring or unpalatable but ultimately is good for you, will be challenged. In its place will be a responsive, flexible pattern of Church life which seeks to deliver not only what individuals want, but also which draws on the depth and variety of the Christian tradition.²⁷

Ward advocates the transition from need to desire, from authority to example and from refuge to network.

Such a shift, argues Ward, is not inconsistent with the gospel traditions of the church. Indeed, perhaps it is the case that historical models of the community of Christ have been more influenced by institutional survival than by the kingdom of God. As we look beyond the rubble of Christendom in our location at Ground Zero, it may be that we need the assistance of a new symbolic universe to inspire hope once again. Drawing on the insights offered by Ward, I intend to proffer a little of the radical re-imagining which I have argued is necessary in these times. In doing so, I acknowledge limitations of scope and depth determined by a paper of this nature. My aim is the modest one of stimulating debate through the provision of a few provocative ideas in relation to resourcing faith in the post-Christian West of the third millennium.

The Poetry of Dreaming

Academic conferences such as these are often confined by the limits of discourse which are self-imposed in the interests of precision and intellectual rigour. But to discuss the future is to leave behind the more familiar territory of that which can be measured and evaluated. Brueggemann argues that this task requires 'poetic imagination' in order to discuss 'alternative prospects that the managed prose around us cannot invent and does not want to permit'.²⁸ He further explains:

What a commission it is to express a future that none think imaginable! Of course this cannot be done by inventing new symbols, for that is wishful thinking. Rather, it means to move back into

the deepest memories of this community and activate those very symbols that have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness. Therefore the symbols of hope cannot be general and universal but must be those that have been known concretely in this particular history.²⁹

What follows then is an exercise in poetic imagination. It is an attempt to draw on some selected aspects of the Christian tradition which may have new currency given the situation of the church in the West as already described. Within the limits of the paper, the following suggestions act as little more than ciphers to awaken possibility.

(a) Cybermonks

I want to speak here not of the settled communities of monks which lived within the security of a sophisticated order. Rather my interest is in those Celtic monks who followed the call of God to places unknown. These of course were missionary pioneers in a largely re-paganised world.³⁰ Their example gains fresh relevance as Christians once again assume a position on the margins of the world. Monks such as Columbanus had two guiding concerns. The first and paramount one was to structure their lives in response and devotion to God, living a life of prayer and goodness. The second was to travel freely wherever the Spirit might lead, and once called to stop, to there go about their lives of praise and service in a public and missionary way.³¹ From such simple and humble contributions, great springs of spiritual renewal flowed.

Several elements of this paradigm seem to me to be relevant to our times. The first is that the monks were largely self-resourcing and self-directed. To a limited extent they stepped outside the constricting influences of bishops and church councils in determining their own journey of faith.³² Given the moribund state of the church of the day, this may have been a necessary distancing. It may be that our own times call for a similar distancing. After millennia of attempts to guide and control the life of the faithful in ways which have frequently become abusive, a certain experimental space could provide a creative gap. Rather than experience the angst of a self-conscious break with the structures of the church, the monks subverted authority by giving the appearance of belonging while going about their own vocations. This approach has much merit.

Secondly, they struck off into the unknown without apprehension. The work which they did in nourishing their own spiritual lives was enough to diminish fears of any threat to it. The tradition which they lived out of was portable, adaptable and inviolate. Their practice of faith was only marginally connected to the institution which claimed a franchise upon it. It was to the quality of their own lives that they appealed rather than seeking to bolster their case with external authority. This approach proffers a model for current circumstances. Genuine spirituality rooted in gospel verities has its own persuasive power, whatever the intellectual climate. Christian pilgrims who trust the story they live out of need have no fear of the times or the surrounding culture. Both individuals and small informal communities can be bearers of a narrative which the church has betrayed.

Finally, the monastic pattern of association offers a potential model for Christian belonging. The monks maintained a loose network of pilgrims united by a common vision, even though often geographically dispersed. They kept alive a sense of common purpose through the writing of letters, personal friendships, and occasional visits. In this time when communication is so much easier, a dispersed network of cybermonks is a feasible alternative to 'heavy' church, with all its gravitas and need to control. People can take up residence in cultural outposts far from what has previously be familiar, and there live out their lives of quiet devotion among the inhabitants, supported by friendships and shared experiences which are sustained through correspondence and infrequent gatherings. I don't imagine that clergy would be in support of such a move, threatening as it is to their own power and survival. But that is in question due to other forces.

(b) Festivals

The concept of religious festivals is certainly not unique to Christianity, and has an immediate historical precedent within Judaism. In essence a religious festival is a gathering of the dispersed tribes around some event which is an act of remembrance, celebration or learning. In Bauman's terms what we are talking about is 'carnival communities'. For much of its history Christianity has had such festivals, with Easter and Christmas being the most universally acknowledged. But, with the onset of modernity and the challenge of the Reformation, the centre of devotional life for the ordinary faithful has been that of the specific church community. Such allegiances with their demand for time and commitment are rapidly dissolving in these more liquid times. Ward is quite correct to accentuate the metaphor of shopping to describe the increasing trend toward consumer attitudes on the part of Christian worshippers. His suggestion of a shift toward encouraging spiritual desire rather than manufacturing unwanted religious product is perceptive and timely.

It may be that in these chastened times for Christianity, many of the tasks previously performed by the fixed church community could be more usefully transferred to sporadic religious festivals. These would be motivated not by any agenda to maintain or control a finite group of people, but rather to resource those who have determined their own spiritual pilgrimages and wish to from time to time to nourish their faith through drawing upon specific contributions. Such festivals would also give expression to the inherently communal nature of Christian faith, while reserving accountability to more intimate settings with some degree of authenticity. Many of the educative, worship, formative and sacramental functions of the church could be provided through such carnivals of faith. 33

Travelling communities might function much in the same way that circus troupes do today, albeit with inspiration as their agenda rather than entertainment. Resource capture would be much diminished compared to present denominational hierarchies. To those who protest at the naivety of the proposal, there is evidence that this pattern is already emergent. As one example, the Greenbelt Festival in Britain has been operating for some 30 years.³⁴ A Christian Arts Festival, Greenbelt seeks to offer artistic excellence, theological reflection and the experience of diverse worship to the thousands who gather annually. Many participants speak of Greenbelt as their church. What they are expressing is that it has become for them a centre where their identity is forged and their faith resourced, even though it happens but once a year. Other examples might include the Iona and Taizé communities, both of which have settled base communities, but influence spiritual pilgrims throughout the world through the provision of resources and festivals. The process of transition may be already substantially under way.

(c) Sensuality

Several centuries of modernity have made the Western church aesthetically anorexic. The triumph of reason, when added to an historic suspicion of images and the feminine, has provided thin gruel for embodied human beings. Paganism becomes an attractive option when compared to the asthenic and colourless face of demythologised Christianity. What has become of the art, the symbolism, the mystery, the wonder and the transcendent earthiness of Christian faith? It is no surprise to me that those sections of the church which are resistant to current haemorrhaging are those such as the high Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions which have preserved some colour and bodily resonance in their worship. There is within the broad stream of Christian tradition a *via positiva* which accepts the incarnation as an affirmation of bodily existence, rather than treating it with extreme suspicion.³⁵ Perhaps it has taken the rise of feminist theology to bring it out of the shadows and offer it as a gift to the church.

In practical terms, the recovery of sensuality would mean a new romance between faith and

artistic expression. Perhaps the greatest missiological contribution to be made to the post-Christian West would be that of funding it symbolically so that the unlikely prospect of conversation is enabled.³⁶ That would require a non-strategic embrace of the arts and artists; a whole-hearted celebration of the creative process whatever its outcome. Such rich alliances have been known within Christian history, and the results have been enduring. In parallel with this, a renewal of the importance of ritual and sacrament would help to ground Christianity in the everyday structures of human life, rather than removing it to some spiritualised and unattainable realm. That, of course, might mean some theological reconfiguration, particularly on the part of Protestants.

It is in the arena of sexuality where Christianity must recapture the orthodox relationship between sensuality and the sacred. Nothing much in the past two thousand years has dispelled the notion that Christians don't like sex, would prefer that it didn't happen and regard it in an entirely functional way as a means of procreation. The church's dis-ease with sex, which ironically manifests itself in obsession and abuse, has made it a source of ridicule and diminished the seriousness with which ordinary women and men can regard its proclamation. It may be that the ecclesial authorities have done as much to divorce sexuality from love as all the pornographers combined. Do we dare to hope that the current crisis in the Western church might be sufficient to allow the followers of Christ to be at home in their bodies? Time will tell.

Conclusion

When the towers fall, there is an abiding sense that nothing can be the same again. But loss, when treated with the prophetic salve of grief, can often become the locus of new hope. Beyond Ground Zero lies the unknown. That strange territory of the future will be best explored by those who deeply inhabit the stories and traditions of the past. New stories and traditions will be forged out of the experiences which lie ahead. The greatest asset is courage to cross the threshold of the future rather than turning our backs on it and preferring nostalgia. These few symbols presented here are intended to provoke desire rather than answer any questions. They are the opening of a conversation rather than the solution to a problem. The one thing I am sure of is that the road beyond this point will only be discovered in humility and partnership.

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1 **'But we have now come to the end of Christendom.** We are nearing the end of the global supremacy of the Christian west. We are even seeing the collapse of conventional Christianity.' Lloyd Geering, *The World to Come: From Christian Past to Global Future* (Wellington: Bridget William Books 1999) p.4. See also Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* ed. A. Neely, W. Pipkin, and W. Shenk *Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press 1997).

2 Anderson speaks of 'a massive historical transition that took place throughout Western civilization over a period of several centuries' in which 'the reality structure embodied in the medieval Church and the feudal system gradually declined, lost its status as the definer of cosmic truth and the shaper of social order'. Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper Collins 1990) p.31.

3 David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religion in the Modern World Ad 1900-2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.7.

4 Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out: What the English Church Survey Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research 2000).

5 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge 2001).

6 Kevin Ward, *Believing without Belonging: Church in the Aftermath of the 60s* [Internet] (Reality Magazine, 2000 [cited 3 September 2002]); available from <http://www.reality.org.nz/articles/43/43-ward.html>

7 Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK 1998) p.3.

8 Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* p.7.

9 'Modern historical, philosophical and scientific thought has come into conflict at so many points with traditional Christian teaching that the latter has been losing its power to convince ordinary people (to say nothing of the intelligentsia). Geering, *The World to Come* p.66. See also John Shelby Spong, *Into the Whirlwind: The Future of the Church* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press 1983) pp.16-29.

10 See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Geneva: WCC 1989). Hall notes: 'There is a crisis in authority in every branch of Christendom today and for good reason, for all truth is being relativized, and with it the security systems of the Christian church are visibly shaking.' Hall, *The End of Christendom* p.23.

11 Elizabeth Green sees this as stemming from a culturally-conditioned theological orientation: 'the problem lies in the relation of dominance and submission inscribed in Christianity'. Elizabeth Green, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Feminist Theology as Second Coming" (paper presented at the Burns Lectures, University of Otago, Dunedin, 2002).

12 See Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches* (Wellington: Philip Garside 2000) p.117f.

13 'The natural response of the tradition-bearing person living in the storms of new learning is to batten down the hatches and seek safety.' Spong, *Into the Whirlwind* p.119.

- 14 See Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (London: SPCK 1995) p.23f.
- 15 Based on the book by Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah 2000).
- 16 David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000).
- 17 Wuthnow, for example, argues that 'taking Christianity seriously argues even more strongly for an optimistic appraisal of the future'. Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993) p.217.
- 18 Walter Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1978).
- 19 Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.50.
- 20 'Too many Christians are looking for strategic or structural solutions, convinced that if they stumble upon the right formula or movement, all will be well. But the deep reinterpretation of the Christian movement necessary to this age has as its precondition the spiritual anguish of confessing failure.' Riddell, *Threshold of the Future* p.172.
- 21 Leonard Sweet, *Aquachurch: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado: Vital 1999) p.24.
- 22 Zygmunt Baumann, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2000).
- 23 Baumann, *Liquid Modernity* p.34ff.
- 24 See Baumann, *Liquid Modernity* p.37.
- 25 Baumann, *Liquid Modernity* p.199-201.
- 26 Draft manuscript in possession of author.
- 27 Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* [Internet] (Centre for Christian Communication, 2000 [cited 8th October 2002]); available from <http://www.yjb97.dial.pipex.com/events/cag00/papers/ward.htm>.
- 28 Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.45.
- 29 Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* p.66.
- 30 'Pilgrims like Fursey and Colombanus, though seeking salvation and solitude, nevertheless became leaders of Christianity in an age of expansion. They founded a series of monasteries which rapidly became centres of learning, hostels for Irish pilgrims and headquarters of evangelistic effort. In so doing, they helped to mould the institutions of early medieval Europe.' Kathleen Hughes, *Church and Society in Ireland A.D.400-1200* (London: Variorum 1987) p.144.
- 31 'In the Celtic, especially Irish, way of seeing such matters, the ultimate point of spiritual wandering was to 'seek the place of one's resurrection'. This involved seeking to enter the Kingdom of God more easily by means of living in the world as a stranger for Christ's sake. The 'place of resurrection' was the place appointed by God for the particular wanderer to settle and spend the remaining years of life doing penance and waiting for death.' Philip Sheldrake, *Living between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd

1995) p.59.

32 The development of *paruchia* as a monastic alternative to conventional episcopal rule in Ireland is well documented. Kathleen Hughes notes 'It was inevitable that, once established, the monastic *paruchia* should gain a power greater than that of territorial bishoprics.' Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London: Methuen & Co 1966) p.81. While ostensibly the *peregrini* were under the rule of their sending abbot, geographical distance must have made such authority tenuous.

33 'In the Middle Ages, the Christian festivals were not only part of the everyday life of the people, they were a constant source of inspiration and a means of instruction.' Elfrida Vipont, *Some Christian Festivals* (London: Michael Joseph 1963) p.16.

34 Greenbelt Festivals, *Greenbelt* [Internet] (Greenbelt Festivals, 2002 [cited 8th October 2002]); available from <http://www.greenbelt.org.uk/>.

35 See, for example, Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co 1983).

36 Brueggemann describes such funding as '...to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined. Our responsibility, then, is not a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993) p.19f.