

Rediscovering the Revelational Church

By Bill Nikides

Introduction: The World in Search of Identity

The following is a brief ecclesiological statement intended to serve as the basis for both a more comprehensive ecclesiology and as the positive response to sub-ecclesial missiology popular in this day. Such projects are, to be sure, overdue, but are also beyond the scope of this effort. It is born of recent, unprecedented growth within international Presbyterianism and the conviction that a firm understanding of one's true identity in Christ is the best foundation for present and future ministry. Its contents reflect interaction with four ideas, the name "International Presbyterian Church"* , the ecclesiology of the Book of Revelation, the heritage of the historical church and the explosive growth of Christianity in Asia and Africa. I also hope that it will generate much debate and development within reformed churches as they consider both eternal verities and a changing world.

Every theology is a reflection of the tension between the centripetal force exerted by the specific context framing its creation and the centrifugal desire to produce something that transcends local circumstances. This attempt at an ecclesiology is no exception. Early 21st century Europe and America are experiencing waves of change that force societies to confront or adapt, discover or defend. Perhaps nothing so typifies the age as the intense attempt to understand itself.

The challenge of identity for the world: Is this world characterized more by a relentless globalization that creates at least a hybridization of culture or is it in danger of fracturing into a myriad parochialism? When the Wall came down and the "Evil Empire" crumbled, the expectation was that a qualitative barrier had been surmounted. History as a period of fundamental threat and uncertainty was said to be at an end, at least according to Fukuyama.¹ No longer would the world be torn between competing nuclear-powered behemoths. We had grown beyond it.

9/11 and the chaotic, disenfranchised world it illuminated placed the prevailing confidence in question, much as World War One had wrecked postmillennial optimism. What once was seen as hope in progress began to resemble hubris. Like the earlier Roman Mediterranean, the new world is characterized by a rapidly expanding cosmopolitanism. By the first decade of the 21st century, 140 million people were living outside of their birth countries. As millions of migrants crisscrossed the planet, their new communities occasionally assimilated, sometimes retrenched themselves and usually evolved into hybrid cultures, at once familiar and foreign.

What then is a European, an Asian or an American? Better yet, who am I? When I am free to be myself, what self would that be? Is my identity found in myself or in my being part of something bigger and perhaps more enduring? In an endlessly customizable reality, it is hard to pin down definitions and identities. What does freedom mean? Am I free when no one puts me in a box or am I really free when the barriers that separate me from others are removed? Where is my wholeness (*shalom*) found? Is our world marred by Huntington's idea of civilizational conflict or is the fragmentation even closer to the bone?¹¹ Scholars of Islamism such as Olivier Roy

note that Muslim tensions are often with itself and its home cultures more than they are between Islam and others. The Taliban for example opposed not the West so much as traditional Afghan culture, such as the playing of traditional music or flying of kites.ⁱⁱⁱ

When it is all said and done, we are left with the gnawing need for a sense of wholeness and settledness. It seems that for much of the world, modernity has led to an irreducible poverty of soul and a sense of lostness amid license. Will we find definition and home in something to believe? Will resurgent religion reassert itself into the driver's seat or will the answer ultimately be more personal? Is the answer located in something we believe, something we do, or someone with whom we can identify? In other words, is resolution to be found in the intellectual or the relational?

The challenge for the church: Much of the Western church seems to be roiling with the struggle for identity. In a sense, it appears as though we the church are always trying to catch up with a world rapidly rotating on its axis. We have, particularly in the late 20th century, focused on the incarnational dimensions of the gospel. I remember Steve Brown once talking about a couple. Apparently the young wife had been required to have facial surgery. Unfortunately, the operation went horribly wrong. The surgeon accidentally cut a nerve that forced her face into a permanently disfiguring grin. She agonized over the mutilation. Her husband, as Brown tells it, demonstrated his love for her in twisting his own mouth as he kissed her so that their lips would meet. Just as the husband loves his wife, so God loves his people by sending the gospel of Christ into every culture and human circumstance. God twists his own lips to kiss our distorted humanity. It means that God can enter every culture. Kenyans and Balinese can have just as much access as anyone to the Son of God. Moderns, postmoderns, and premoderns all can worship King Jesus without having to leave their own culture and enter another. We do not have to be slaves to outmoded cultural worship artifacts. We can have our needs met.

There is a trap, however, the customization trap. If the gospel is ultimately translatable and the gospel form is ultimately customizable, where does that take humanity, not just individuals, but the collective whole? Where do you stop? What prevents adaptability from descending into disintegration? I think that incarnational thinking, without modification, can drive towards several ends, all sad. The evangelical church has in my lifetime (I am in my 50s) embraced a strong conversionism that valued and focused on the primacy of seeing individuals come to Christ. The making of decisions became the principle aim of both active believers and of evangelical churches. In a sense, it equated the Church itself with saved individuals. At its best, this thinking ensured that the Church was never smaller than the individual. On the other hand, it almost guaranteed that the Church would never be anything more than that. The problems did not go unnoticed.

Evangelism and missions underwent tremendous changes in the late 20th century to redress many of these issues. Much of the change was stimulated by developments in the evangelical academic community. Mark Noll and George Marsden focused a great deal on both the inadequacies of evangelical scholarship and large-scale changes to address the problems.^{iv} One of the most significant changes in the evangelical community was the growing prominence of sociology and anthropology as interpreters of culture and advisors in ministry. American cultural observers of the

church such as George Barna and Wade Clark Roof, not only surveyed public opinion and described the contemporary church, but also began to be insinuated into the process of deciding what church should be.^v The same could be said for the mission field. Anthropologists such as Charles Kraft now drive missions' focus and behavior.^{vi}

As Harvie Conn used to point out, theology was once arrogant and ignored culture altogether. He championed the principled integration of anthropological and sociological insight into ministry.^{vii} Missionaries and church growth theorists listened. There in lies the rub. What happens when anthropology ceases simply to inform? What if it becomes the principle basis for ministry or at least the arbiter of its expression? In an age in which propositional content becomes less certain and dependable, "customer satisfaction" or cultural accommodation becomes a value in itself that drives total processes. What is important is what works best. Social sciences recognize no other criteria. Wade Clark Roof, in fact, likens theologies and traditions as tools in a toolkit that can be used to assemble a church.^{viii} Pick the right parts, use the right tools and an effective church results. But what defines "works" or for that matter "best"? Can the social sciences bear that weight of responsibility? It seems to me that evidence indicates otherwise.

Despite its own perceived credibility problems and potential misuse, biblically-based theology must remain central to the process of defining and discovering identity, whether of persons or of the church. We must assert this first because such is generally not the case in contemporary evangelicalism. Theology is the token presence, validating ministry applications for the picky, but contributing little of substance to the discussions. Nevertheless, questions persist that cry out for biblically and theologically-informed perspectives.

Think about what was said concerning the incarnational focus of modern missiology and church growth methodology. There is an imbalance inherent in focusing exclusively on the incarnation, kenosis and the like. It is possible to see the Church, following an undiluted incarnational concentration, descend into an unbiblical and destructive tribalism. What of the Church's catholicity? Is the church universal only in heaven? If it is to be visibly universal as well as incarnational, how does one manifest these truths? Once again, who decides?

What about the position of the church with regard to the world? Does it approach the world on the basis of their common humanity or does it confront the world on the basis of its alignment with Christ, not just Adam? Is it to be bridge-builder or a prophet? Who chooses? What informs the choice? If we answer "us" and we are all in some way unique, will not these decisions lead to the inevitable disintegration of the church as we identify ourselves fundamental as individual parts of our own cultures? If, on the other hand, we see ourselves as citizens of heaven, will we not either craft churches as fortified castles or as alien spacecraft?

How should the church respond to the fallenness of creation? Should it take its cue from contemporary Western values and identify itself with the winners of the world, the Lord himself promising that everything we ask or imagine to be fulfilled? Would not triumphalism and prosperity best evoke the resurrection and victory of the Lord? On the other hand, can there be identification with the resurrection without going by

way of the cross? If we live between the crucifixion and the new heavens and new earth, what should we look like? Moreover, while we are here, are we most appropriately in the world, of the world, or being used by God to transform the world? Are we then more than conquerors or strangers in a strange land? What is our task between the earthly and heavenly cities? Are we to “win” souls at the expense of losing the world? What value does the physical and temporal have? What of politics, justice, and the environment?

Where can we find the answers? The default answer is, of course, consult the Bible, but this is an authority to which everyone appeals, both saints and heretics. In an age of parody, anything is fodder for clever distortion. More important, who makes these decisions? To be sure, any believer is never alone with the Bible. There must always be a triunity of believer, book and Spirit. But isn't this true in every other age? We must always remember that it was Arius and not Athanasius that appealed to the pristine, exclusive reliance on Scripture. While waiting for a fresh exclusive word from the Lord are we not also reveling in our own hubris? Aren't we just affirming a sanctified form of self-reliance? Must we remain spiritual teenagers, always asserting our excellence over the wisdom of our parents?

The cost of an identity crisis

There is a price for our confusion. We no longer are sure of whom we really are. “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church faces an identity crisis unparalleled in its history.”^{ix} What is a Christian? Twentieth century Protestantism seemed divided in its response. Some see the identity in historic continuity with older churches that emerged from the Reformation period, even when many of these fundamentally denied their own heritage. Theirs is an identity of community based on forms and repeated practices. All that is missing are the founders' theology, biblical formation, and perhaps the Holy Spirit. Mainline denominations became associated with the worst excesses of modernism and liberalism. The problem for these bodies stemmed from their drift during the Enlightenment to rationalism and a poverty of spirituality.

Twentieth century evangelicalism sought alternatives that would bring the church back to biblically centred identity, primarily in the experience of the new birth, revivalism, and the restated authority of Scripture. The earliest part of the twentieth century witnessed the strength of fundamentalism, particularly in the USA. The perceived anti-intellectualism of fundamentalism however compelled evangelicals to pursue self-expressions that were less negative, more engaging of popular culture and engaging with contemporary standards of scholarship. The lion's share of development within evangelicalism, again particularly in the USA was promoted outside of traditional church structures and hierarchies. Parachurch agencies and higher-quality academic institutions with no direct denominational control proliferated. These contributed enormously to world evangelization. Once again, however, everything comes with a price.

While evangelical identity was once generally located within the heritage of established churches emerging out of the Reformation, themselves reflecting a sense of continuity with the “Grand Tradition”, the mainstream Christian world dating back to the early church, it now reflected its broadened interaction with civilizational trends, secular thought, and streams of Christian expression outside the mainstream of

received tradition. Fundamentalism's understanding of Scripture was challenged as modernist and reductionist, opening the possibilities both to a more nuanced treatment conversant in ancient forms of writing and also open to critical treatment in a manner once taught exclusively by liberal non-evangelical theologians. In other words, evangelical practices and definitions of the fundamentals of the faith were being stretched as ideas once held to be antithetical to evangelical faith were now embraced as but mere tools in the toolbox of discerning evangelical thinkers. Systematic theology, a counterweight to the influence of the social sciences declined, fell under suspicion as being just another outdated manifestation of modernism, an unbiblical accretion layered unnecessarily on top of the Hebrew and Greek standard. Its removal from a strong position of influence opened the field to dominance by social sciences, and biblical studies shorn of any integrating mechanism such as would have been supplied by theology, whether biblical or systematic. Evangelical scholars soon began to identify with the disciplines of study cultivated in the academy; with liberal or conservative labels rendered obsolete. The extra-ecclesial organizations established by evangelicals to speed the spread of a historically framed, church-centered gospel became conduits for change that sped the evangelical consensus away from its original identity. Evangelicals, in part, began to embrace ideas and practices that would have been seen as unbiblical two generations before. With no solid understanding of identity to anchor them, the evangelical community began to lose any sense of definition. It what age could the following statement have been endorsed other than our own? "Our task may well be to allow and encourage Muslims and Hindus and Chinese to follow Christ without identifying themselves with a foreign religion."^x

At the same time, evangelicals understood the need to avoid a coming catastrophe, the inevitable consequence of its progressive disintegration. They needed to find some kind of overarching identity. To some, it meant recovering the past; but in an a postmodern age that allows for such customization and redefinition, whose history? The assimilation by many evangelicals of the modernist critique of traditional Protestantism meant that any story that could be embraced would have to not be the orthodox one. Some evangelicals foreswore any confidence in the magisterial Reformation and chose instead to embrace the Left wing or radical Reformation. The result of this of course was the disenfranchisement of Luther and Calvin in favour of either the Anabaptists, as conservative champions of the Bible, or of the rationalist wing of the Radical Reformation. The latter included new voices such as that of Faustus Socinus, who championed the exclusive use of Scripture and reason, to the detriment of tradition and his eschewing of the deity of Christ, the Trinity, atonement, original sin, predestination, and the resurrection of the body.^{xi} All of this speculation was made possible because Socinus and a generation of others rejected the received wisdom of the Church, the earlier history, complete with its creeds, confessions and councils. As Sebastian Franck and other radicals asserted, all one needed was the text and the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. These ideas are alive and well. They suffuse the contemporary Western church and have been championed by a large portion of the missionary community. It's not your granddad's church anymore.

Our uncertain sense of who we all are in Christ makes us vulnerable to other voices. In particular, we are prone to corruption by worldly Svengalis shaping our self-understanding. We have become a people without roots, constantly reshaped by every present contingency, tossed about in the riptides of fashion or theory. Consider the

impact of Wade Clark Roof's observation, "Sociologically speaking, there is no church for all time." We have made such a virtue of options that we have lost almost all sense of self. "We have lost our way. "The Church's unwitting capitulation to powerful cultural forces has caused it to lose its prophetic, other-worldly voice. We must remember that we are the people of the future, formed by the past, and living in the present."^{xii} The evangelical world has lost its way. We have gone the way of the modern man, adrift on a dark sea without any light to guide us or any shore to hug. We have a compass, but all of the bearings point north. I contend that recovering our true identity is the only viable option. I also contend that this identity must be rooted in an evangelical faith found within the apostolic, international, visible and interdependent church. I do not think so because I believe that tradition trumps Scripture. In fact, I think that a clear understanding of Scripture requires such a conclusion. I hope to prove my point by reintroducing us all to the church found in the Book of Revelation.

The Revelational Church

What exactly is the church? It seems to me that along with other issues, we typically start in the wrong place when we address this question. We start and focus attention on the meaning of *ekklesia* or we look for examples in the Book of Acts. What we neglect however are basic presuppositional issues that effect everything else we know about the church. Simon Chan's recent ***Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community*** is a great blessing to us in placing a spotlight on the basic nature of the church. He inquires, "Is the church to be seen as an instrument to accomplish God's purpose in creation, or is the church the expression of God's ultimate purpose itself?"^{xiii} Another way of asking the question is, "Does the church exist for the sake of creation or did God create the world because he wished to create and love a covenantal community, the church?" If the church is primarily an instrument, then everything it is and does is simply a means to a more significant end. God wanted a particular kind of creation, but sin intruded, forcing God to craft a solution that included the church, but also might logically include other options. Chan comments that this approach ends up seeing the Old Testament parenthetically, ignores the core covenantal relations between God and humanity and conceives of the church as a subspecies of creation. Reading the Book of Revelation, particularly in the light of Genesis, Exodus and Ezekiel emphatically denies this instrumentalist understanding of the church.

This, however, is not the picture we gain from reading the Bible as a whole. The world was created as a means through which God could create and love a covenantal people, a holy nation, what we now know as the church. As Chan notes, in this sense the church precedes creation since creation was made for the sake of the church.^{xiv} If this is true, then God's highest expression is the new heavens and new earth, the New Jerusalem, the church. Looking at it another way, Genesis introduces us to a covenantal people formed from the progeny of Abraham and that story culminates in a purified people, all Abraham's children, living in a new world their home. To be sure the Bible is a story of God's redemption of fallen humanity in Christ, but it is completed exclusively within the church. Once again, to approach the same thing from another point of view, to accept the church as an end and not a means is to grasp that the church is indeed a culture and not simply a component within a culture. So much for the endless fragmentation of the church when we overemphasize the incarnation. We can finally see the gospel as truly the force bringing together all that

sin had torn apart. We must see this or we face dire consequences. If the election of the whole people of God is not seen as an end in itself and for God's sake 'to the praise of God's glory', the tendency is to see the church as simply one of a number of entities whose legitimacy is to be established solely based on their ability to serve a higher, all-transcending goal" (namely the renewal of creation and salvation of people).^{xv} This however clashes with the biblical evidence. First, through the Holy Spirit, the church is uniquely united with the godhead and therefore cannot be either optional or only one solution among many. Second, it means that it is not simply the best means through which to unite with Christ, it is the only means. Finally, it means that the redemptive story of Scripture is ours alone. It is the inheritance of the body of Christ, the church.

To my mind, there is no more neglected or more valuable description of the church than that found in the Book of Revelation. The combination of its often inaccessible language and unfamiliar form often relegates the book to service as either a postscript to Jesus' resurrection or as an expression of a kind of Christian voyeurism. Even its omega position within the canon leaves the impression that the only reason for its placement is that it deals with the future, the things that happen last. This is a shame in as much as the work also pulls together the first 65 chapters of the canonical text and serves to summarize the entire content of the Bible for the church of the time. If it did all of that for them, perhaps it might do the same for us.

To be sure, it does deal with the future, but I think that its positioning serves more than one purpose. Some of these are directly relevant for our discussion. In addition to describing the future of creation and of redeemed humanity, the book also functions to remind the church of its true identity as seen from the perspective of heaven (Rev 4:1ff). Such a reminder is imperative since the churches in the book balance on the edge of persecution and compromise. The degree to which actual persecution was present in Domitian's reign is disputed, ranging from the positing of campaigns of coercion and sporadic physical violence to those who see the book as a prophecy looking forward to great future persecution. The resolution of disagreements concerning the scope of persecution is not essential to our discussion. Even the threat of systematic persecution could result in the sorts of behaviour addressed by the book.^{xvi}

In short, members of the visible churches were tempted to either recant their faith or at least make concessions to the prevailing authorities on behalf of the popular culture that dangerously compromised their faith and its effectiveness as a witness to the nations. G.K. Beale recounts the options. In addition to the obvious choices of recantation or openly confessing Christ, believers could attend trade guild festivals honouring foreign gods or practiced deception, by openly supporting the gods while secretly professing faith in Christ.^{xvii} The predicament of the believers remains as fresh and relevant to us as it was to them.

John counters the drift of vacillating believers by reminding them of their true heritage, their true identity. Richard Bauckham describes the process as "a purging of the Christian imagination" by providing prophetic counter-images that offer an alternative perspective on contemporary life.^{xviii} Rather than simply stating propositions, he weaves together a description that meshes together the Old and New Testament's understandings of the people of God. The church is not simply a body of

people with convictions about Jesus. They are the people of God, chosen by him to indwell and then serve as both beacon and army to the nations. It is a relationship that long predates Christ's incarnation. Christ is significant in that he provides the only means with which to properly understand the Old Testament record, but there is also a sense in which the Old interprets the New. Revelation is crammed with the interplay of both Testaments, bringing both together into a whole that is then extended into the future. In a sense, it is the ultimate book of *shalom*, of wholeness. Everything comes together and finds its true place in the creation order, every promise is realized in Christ's "yes" and every thought or practice that serves as an idolatrous substitute is exposed and purged.

At the heart of Revelation's description is the Church as a worshiping community. Beyond everything else, this underlines our identity based on our relationship to God not things we do. Think of how critical such an insight is. There is the immense temptation to pride based on how well we demonstrate our identity and there is a powerful temptation to despair when we fail to carry out our calling. The letters to the churches in Revelation demonstrate that concern. To both the threat posed by overconfidence and the threat of the sense of helplessness, God answers with an overwhelming portrait of the Bride of Christ. How does John follow up his pastoral letters to the churches? He sees a door opened into heaven and what do we see (Rev 4:1)? We see the church as a worshiping community. Why is this important for seven churches with the sword of persecution dangling over them? First, it reminds them that what the world says and what the world thinks does not ultimately matter. It does not matter because the church is not essentially of the world. The celebration of Word and Sacrament testify to the ontological difference as well as form the church itself. The church in its worship opposes everything that the world stands for.^{xix} It was formed by God and exists for God's glory. As Chan says, the end of worship is worship.^{xx} Finally, it is in worship that we both respond to and identify ourselves with God's complete character as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Any worship or any religious practice that does less is sub-biblical and non-Christian. It is only this sort of identity forged in worship that can empower the Body of Christ as it ministers in the world.

What then does all of this say to the church? Who is it in practical terms and where is it headed? Revelation serves to encourage the church to faithfully testify to Christ to the world and to the corrupt, adulterated church, regardless of cost. But on what basis should Christians act? What makes such a response in the face of persecution imperative? The answer is in a sense simple. The church must remember who it really is. But who does John say that the church really is? One answer of course is found in the complex interplay of Old and New Testament motifs. The church is Israel enlarged by the nations and fulfilled in Christ. It is the people of Exodus, freed from oppression by God, saved and coming home where they belong. It is the elect of God, not in the sense that everyone in the visible assembly of Israel or in the worldwide church is saved, but in the larger sense that salvation is only found within that covenantal body. The central image reinforcing the exodus theme is Christ the Passover Lamb introduced in Rev 5:9-10, ransoming people to God. As Bauckham points out, we then see that it is the Christian martyrs, the faithful witnesses that comprise the exodus (Rev 15:2-4), singing a new Song of Moses, not as one homogeneous people of God as in Exodus 15, but rather as the redeemed nations, the new Israel of God, moving to their new home.^{xxi}

Furthermore, the image of wilderness wanderers is once again juxtaposed with the martyr. The martyrs are the members of the heavenly host of eschatological Israel waging a spiritual conquest of fallen creation at the behest of their Lord and King, the risen Lamb. They are also part of the New Exodus, moving from earthly cities that persecuted them to a heavenly city. As they go, they witness without reservation or distortion to the one who saved them. It is this common faithful witness that most identifies the people of God in the Revelation. Beyond this, it is a witness not only to Christ as Lord and God in the present, but part of a Song that has been sung by God's Covenant children starting in Genesis. It is a family tune. It is also Jesus' song. When we live out our identity as martyr-witnesses, we are singing with Jesus, we are following after him, cross and all.

The New Jerusalem well explains this identity in gathering. They are therefore moving from a fallen world that had twisted and imprisoned them to a new one that flowed with milk and honey, or as Revelation itself illustrated, a city whose inhabitants would be nourished forever with a river of life, illuminated with the constant presence of the living God, and healed with the leaves of the tree of life. In contrast to Rome, prostituted cosmopolitanism personified, Jerusalem, by contrast, is the city of peace and shalom (wholeness, completion, and peace) for all of God's people.^{xxii} It is the completion of creation, not an agent in that process. It is not a sociological invention. It is not a parenthesis. It is not one of many means to Christ. It is the tent of meeting, like the tabernacle (*skene*) created after the exodus from Egypt, but eschatologically completed in Christ. It evokes memories of Ezekiel. "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people (Ezek 37:26-27)." This promise is in turn renewed and consummated in Revelation: "Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God (Rev 21:3)."

This new Israel would also be a body of nations. Baruch Maoz points out the relevance of Ephesians' conclusion that "Before the world was made, God had purposed to gather all things into Christ (1:10). The calling of Jews and Gentiles into one body of faith, love and obedience is an outworking of that purpose (1:10-23)."^{xxiii} In this way, Revelation reflects the culmination of the Abrahamic promises made in Genesis 17. God's people would be a multitude of nations (Gen 17:4). In other words, John is not saying that the church would consist of a Christ-following Israel and the nations. There would not be more than one church. "A more probable analysis is that Gen 17:2ff, and especially Gen 35:11 and 48:3-4, 19 refer to the increase of the Israelite seed, which becomes so dominant on earth that other "nations" identify with Israel and are accordingly blessed by being included in God's people, true Israel."^{xxiv} This is exciting. It means that the basic definition of the one true church necessarily includes the nations. Genesis 22 and 26 extend the point by underlining the fact that everything flows out of the patriarch's seed. The church cannot be a loose conglomeration of peoples and cultures sharing the same general experiences and convictions. The church is something more organic. It is the end of creation, not the other way around, its final shalom or resting place.

Revelation's use of numbers underlines the continuity with Israel. There is a heavenly census taken of the people of God. The number is easy enough to explain. The number 12 has always been associated with the people of God, Israel, being representative of the number of the tribes of Israel. Twelve is also the number of the apostles. The combination is multiplied by 1,000 to indicate the entire people of God as Rev. 7:9-17 indicates.^{xxv} Though the number of believers is symbolic at 144,000, it does underline the covenantal connection. Israel too numbered its believers, and interestingly enough, at the same general point. Israel numbered its host when it went to war (see Num 1:3ff; 26:2; 1Chr 27:23; 2 Sa 24:1-9). Revelation paints its picture against the backdrop of cosmic conflict. It was the holy nation that went to war in the Old Testament and it is the holy people of God from all over the world that enters the fray today. Therefore, the 144,000 do not describe a remnant of true believers, but the whole church engaged in struggle, from which if faithful, it will emerge purified.^{xxvi} Each letter to the seven churches in chapters two and three culminates in "to the one who conquers (or overcomes), clearly a military reference. The real difference between the Old Testament and the New is the manner in which the battle is waged and victory is won. Christ conquered through his sacrificial death on the cross and the subsequent defeat of death through the resurrection. Jesus was obedient even unto death. By remaining faithful witnesses through suffering and even death the church is triumphant, victory by paradox. Just as God has redeemed people from all the nations through a suffering prophetic witness (Rev 5:9), so he will use their own suffering prophetic witness to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel (Rev 11:3-13).^{xxvii} The overarching point that the Revelation makes is that the church, the entire people of God are to be characterized by martyr-witness in the face of the world's opposition that judges the world, sanctifies the Body and ushers in the triumph of God's kingly rule.

Revelation gives us something quite indispensable, a witness that subverts any attempt of the church to surrender itself to the prevailing culture. It also gives us a clear understanding of ourselves in terms that effectively knit us to every other part of the church, everywhere and for all time. As we struggle to find coherence and cohesion in our postmodern world, perhaps we would benefit from listening more intently to the last word God gave us before he closed the book. I suggest that several aspects of Revelation's portrait of the church point the way forward for us. Revelation, for example, addresses the church as a **covenantal community**. It is the olive tree, Israel of God. There is therefore only one Body of Christ, one redeemed family. Second, it is a community of **martyr-witnesses** engaged in spiritual conflict as it journeys through ungodly cultures. Third, it is comprised as a single visible body of all of the nations. In other words, the **international** nature of the church is a basic component of its identity, not just a consequence of its missiological activity. This, in turn, implies an additional feature of the Revelational church. Its webs of relationships are secured **interdependently**. The nations are therefore indispensable to one another. The curse of the Tower of Babel dissolves into the realized community of Mt Zion. My point is that this picture should be paradigmatic for the church today, rather than serve as an eschatological distant horizon; with us toiling within church structures formed by 16th and 17th century political settlements. Truly, the Bible presents many wonderful images of the church. I simply assert that none have greater urgency for our own time than those found in Revelation. We desperately need to hear in our time that we are most basically a single, visible covenant community of redeemed martyr-witnesses, people from all of the nations

living in interdependent communion with one another as we engage in the visible extension of the kingdom for the glory of God. When we see ourselves this way and act out of this understanding, we embody the shalom of God and reflect Christ to the dying world.

The blessings of old Christians

Embracing the Great Tradition: As Revelation demonstrated, we must remember that we are one people that exist in real continuity with our past. There is one redeemed community, one people, one family that runs from Abraham through the nations to us. Not only are the nations indispensable to us, so are our ancestors. This runs counter to so much of contemporary missiological and ecclesiological thought. To be sure, we are not advocating a Magesterium or a rigid dogmatic straightjacket that would prevent us from theologizing today. What is envisaged is a self-concept where we sit at the same communion table with the Lord and all believers everywhere and for all of time. In another sense, when we theologize, we do so as though we were sitting at a dining table with all of our learned relatives, our extended family, and because we wish to imitate our Lord, we sit with humility, listening to their advice. We get to speak, yes, and we even contribute, but we listen most of the time. As we listen and engage, we become wise.

We have enormous blessings because we are not orphans in the faith. Sometimes, modern missiology implies that theologizing has to be done in hermetically sealed, culturally pure communities. Accordingly, communities of cultural believers or seekers are given biblical texts in their own languages and exhorted to go and develop their own theological understanding, the idea, of course, being to prevent Westerners from contaminating the process with their own unique brand of syncretism. There are several things we should note. First, these communities are not really theologizing in culturally pure surroundings. They are using translations that are likely the products of Western translators that convey their own theological slants through the translation process. Second, they are taught to approach the text by people using methodologies at least developed by outsiders. These reflect a Western way of seeing at the very least and may, in some cases, reflect the theologies of the contemporary formulators. Third, there really is no such thing as a pristine culture. Cultures like people are always in flux. What this methodology really means is that new Christians from non-Western cultures are often denied access to 2,000 years of accumulated wisdom, most of which is far more valuable to their cultures than the recent musings of contemporary missionaries.

The truth is that we are beneficiaries of a “Grand Tradition” running from the apostles and through the Reformation. It is not a perfect reflection of the mind of Christ, but it is a wise and faithful preservation of real gospel understanding. It is in our best interest to engage and embrace our past, particularly as we receive it through the early church and through the early church’s renaissance, the Reformation. To be sure, addressing these two periods is an endeavor too big for us here. I think that it would be most helpful to concentrate our attention on aspects of each that impact the church today. Accordingly, we will examine four characteristics of the church embraced by the early church that are found in the Nicene Creed, oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Second, we will look briefly at a few characteristics of the Reformation, particularly those that emerged in the Reformation, but that were impeded in the period of and following the European religious wars. We will refer to these as

Reformational values, not as an attempt to lock the definition of the church into the 16th century but because we see in some of these values biblical values that extend far beyond geographical and temporal boundaries.

As we examine what exactly were apostolic and reformational values, we should note one thing that both held in common and that have immediate applicability to our situation. “It would not have occurred to any New Testament writer to suppose that a man might be ‘in Christ’ yet not ‘in the Church’: it would have seemed a logical impossibility, somewhat like saying of a man that he has parents, yet is not a member of a family.”^{xxviii} The same truth connects the Bible, the early church and the Reformation. Unlike our own age, the Church was assumed to be the only vehicle for the Gospel. Our contemporary understanding of the Body of Christ as a disembodied spirituality or autonomous communities sharing common practices would have been simply unthinkable concepts to the Grand Tradition. Likewise, contemporary evangelism or missions calling people to Christ, but not to the church of the Grand Tradition would have been seen as outright heresy by any prior age.

Apostolic values: Nothing better captures the biblical understanding of the essence of the church than the Nicene Creed. Though it did not emerge until the doctrinal struggles of the fourth century, it faithfully captured the mind of the apostolic witness. Its framers were steeped in a biblical worldview that extended without interruption from the biblical period. Additionally, it better understood that world than we. The creed represents the values of a biblically saturated church threatened by a backlash from the Mediterranean world that wished to judge the church and the faith on the basis of values derived from Greco-Roman philosophical values. The church could not allow this attempt at syncretism. Accordingly, it resolved to promote unsullied biblical values in the face of great political and intellectual opposition. In this sense, it was a great affirmation of the character of the church, living in the light of the gospel, even when surrounded by so much darkness. Coming to grips with the true nature of its framing should help us to embrace its values, because its circumstances closely align with our own. Far from being a statement of imperial power wedded to Greek philosophy, it really depicted the triumph of the church as martyr-witness, symbolized in the life of a key contributor to its theology, Athanasius.

We believe in one: When we recognize and honour practical unity, we are living out our lives in imitation of Jesus. Consider the high priestly prayer and its hope for the church, “That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21). Unity is both basic to our identity and to our witness. As long as we remain divided, particularly when we are in doctrinal agreement, we stand in imitation of the world and not the Trinity. This understanding of oneness is also practical and not esoteric. It has both the aroma of Christ and earthiness about it. There is nothing of an esoteric ecumenical sweeping-it-under-the-rug in either John 17 or in the Revelatory or apostolic understanding of the church. Nor is Moore College theology’s equating of visible denominations with mission societies on target.^{xxix} The church is not just an assembly in heaven or a collective of the elect. It is a connectional body in visible communion on the earth.

Holy: We live in an artificial, derivative world. In this costume-jewelery reality, remakes and parodies are often better than the original. Foundations disappear and it

is difficult to find any sense of true authenticity. The witness of the church, living among the ruins of the present world too often looks like just another sales job, a form of clever (at best) manipulation; all show and no substance, what Texans refer to as “all hat and no cattle.” The only thing that can restore the witness of the church in the world is a radical otherness without radical separation (Eph 5:26-27; Eph 2:21; 1Pt 2:5,9). Philip Ryken observes, “We lack the kind of personal and corporate holiness that would recommend the truth of the Gospel to our culture. One of the great weaknesses-maybe the great weakness of the church today is the absence of radical godliness that would set us apart from the world.”^{xxx} We must be clear about one thing however. We must be clear about where the radical otherness comes from. It is emphatically not generated by different behaviour. To be sure, we must manifest radically different values from those of the world, but the differences do not originate in our lifestyle. They are rooted in far richer soil. In the New Testament, holiness is overwhelmingly a characteristic of the Holy Spirit.^{xxxi} The church and its citizens, believers, are in the first place holy because they are the residence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are holy first because we are united to the Triune God through the Holy Spirit and then only because of that are we holy because we are separated from the world. The order very much matters. It means we are as a church the ontological people of God. The church is not the church simply because of the functions it carries out, but because of whom it is.

Catholic: Whenever we hear the word “catholic” we rush to reassure one another that it does not mean “Roman Catholic” (i.e. denominational), but rather “universal.” This is quite true and also very inadequate. Edmund Clowney once said, “Catholicity is found in the church’s identity (its relation to the Triune God), not simply in geography, numbers or sociological statistics.”^{xxxii} Catholicity is located in particular theology and history. Catholicity first means “real” or “authentic”, not just “widespread”. In its Greek form, it also carries with it the idea of purity and integrity. It signifies an inner quality of biblical consistency that spanned history and extended globally. Finally, we must underline the fact that it is essentially a theological concept that elevates both biblical consistency and theological rigor. Yes, doctrine should matter to the church. How should this visible unity be expressed? How do we live out a unity of belief? It seems to me that interdependence best expresses the dynamic of catholicity. We were created to need God and to be in relation to him, but we were also created for one another. We help complete each other. Nothing better expresses the image of God than a collective, redeemed humanity. If the Tower of Babel exposed the curse of fallen, strife-ridden international cultures then redeemed international people in communion must reflect both the actions and the character of the Triune God. We become a church in its truest sense, the sense that Revelation illuminates with its gathering of the nations and assimilation into the assembly of God’s covenant people, when our visible churches connect the nations interdependently.

In the fourth century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem enumerated what the early church thought of catholicity. The church was “denominated catholic because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men’s knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it universally treats and heals the whole

class of sins, which are committed by soul or body; and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deed and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts.”^{xxxiii} What a wonderful picture of heaven. What a wonderful portrait of the church.

And apostolic church: To be apostolic is to go the way of the apostles. It is to learn what they learned and practice the faith as they did. It means embracing Christ-centred and biblically saturated preaching and teaching, expression that displays the glories of salvation by grace through faith. Andrew Walls describes the practice of subscribing to ancient creeds. His approach is to scrap these and replace them with local, contemporary statements that affirm the worship of the God of Israel, the “ultimate” significance of Jesus, the belief that God is active with and through believers, and that these believers constitute a people of God.^{xxxiv} This seems to be in a sense a repudiation of apostolicity. Apostolicity does nothing to impede fresh theological expressions, but it insists that their production stand in continuity with the tradition of the church, even when at points we disagree with specific statements. By all means, write creeds and confessions for the here and now, particularly when the culture within which you live requires new theological and biblical light. The process of theologizing should reflect humility and wisdom. Doing so in agreement with apostolic tradition as it has been passed to us seems to reflect such priorities. Most importantly, we need to affirm these truths because they themselves reflect an even deeper reality. The one thing that binds the church to oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, according to the biblical record is the Holy Spirit. In other words, the true church in order to be authentic, must evidence these attributes because to do so is to genuinely reflect real, ontological union with Christ, the truest identity of the church.^{xxxv}

Reformational values: Like every other story, we need to start at the beginning. When we evaluate the Reformation, we often tend to start too late, with the consequences. Accordingly, we see it as a perhaps necessary but inevitably destructive enterprise that fragmented the communion of the church. This is too bad, because it overlooks essential points. Because it starts with the end instead of the beginning, it tends to overlook both its motives and causes. To get to the point, the Reformation never attempted to innovate something, to introduce ideas that would fracture the body. We must underline the crucial fact that what the Reformers attempted to do was recover not invent. Specifically, the Reformers worked to recover the doctrine and church of the apostles. People such as John Knox saw the true church as continuous with an Israel fulfilled in Christ. The Church is “*the bodie and spouse of Christ Jesus, catholike, that is, universal, because it conteinis the Elect of all ages, of all realms, nations and tongues, be they of the Jewes, or be they of the Gentiles.*”^{xxxvi} This essential continuity ties our three tasks together, the alignment of our beliefs with those expounded by the Book of Revelation, the early church as enumerated in the Nicene Creed and the Reformation.

Because the Reformation affirmed the apostolic church as understood through its creeds and councils, and in contradistinction to the medieval Roman Catholic Church, it had to focus its attention to the understanding of ecclesiology every bit as much as it did to justification. Every issue that the Reformers dealt with revolved around how those issues were manifested in the Church. In short, even the possibility of the gospel

ministry existing outside the church would have been unthinkable. It was the Reformers who affirmed Augustine that there was no salvation outside of the church. This was not because the visible church had some power over the Word or Spirit, but rather because God had ordained the Church as the means through which Word and Spirit were to be manifest. To the Reformers, circumventing this truth would have been like Adam and Eve, ejected from the Garden, attempting to overpower the cherubim, with his flaming sword, and break back in. What the Reformers were doing was recognizing the essential covenantal characteristic of the Church. It was consummated Israel, not some sort of parenthetical substitute.^{xxxvii} It was **the** way of salvation.

Additionally, the Reformers saw in the church, stability and standardization concerning its identity, structure, offices and to some degree practices. I am not attempting to imply agreement concerning the specifics. To the contrary, the Reformers constantly argued about ecclesiological details. What I do mean is that the Reformers shared an ontological understanding of the church, an understanding that it exists in continuity with the past and that its worship in one way or another shared a common liturgical sense. All embraced the apostolic tradition as it was expressed in the later Apostles Creed. Scottish believers, for example, seeking admission to the Lord's Supper, were required to know it. Reformation-era confessions such as the Westminster Confession of Faith were considered to be expositions of the Apostles Creed.^{xxxviii} The Reformers, like the whole church since the post-apostolic period, embraced the idea of liturgy as the best defense against creeping schism and heresy. Calvin himself demonstrated a strong sense of continuity with the church before. He affirmed, for example, that the stability of the church is the stability of Christ.^{xxxix} He proclaimed in the strongest terms, "It is also no common praise to say that Christ has chosen and set apart the church as his bride, 'without spot or wrinkle' (Eph 5:27), 'his body and . . . fullness' (Eph 1:23). From this it follows that separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ."^{xl} All of the Reformational churches affirmed the holy, Catholic Church. Finally, nothing testified to the Reformation's essential understanding of itself as the visible, Body of Christ better than its core devotion to the frequent celebration of the Eucharist. "In spite of Calvin's emphasis on the word, which he held to have been wickedly neglected for centuries in the Church, he also considered the Church to be essentially a Eucharistic fellowship. It is the objective reality of the Eucharist that is peculiar to the Church's corporate worship, for while the proclamation of the Word is made, in the course of the pastor's admonitions to the people, to individuals as well as to congregations, corporate worship in the full sense is Eucharistic."^{xli}

We tend to see the fragmentation of the Church into its myriad denominations and we see the advent of religious wars that so devastated Europe that it scarcely recovered from the damage demographically in the 19th century. It never recovered from its radical mistrust of religiosity or of its resulting anticlericalism. This is unfortunate. The Reformation indeed spun in directions that none of the Reformers foresaw or welcomed, and for which we all have to now endure. To acknowledge this however is not to denigrate its wonderful recovery of biblical ecclesiology **before** the church slid into permanent disintegration. This is a vital point. We reformed Christians tend to see our own national church structures as virtues, but these were the unintended consequences of earlier conflict. In other words, we accept our ecclesiologies as

givens. What I suggest is that a careful examination of the Reformation yields ecclesiology that is both biblical at its core and hugely helpful to us now as we see the church develop in a new century with changing dynamics.

This is what an examination of the Reformation's values yields. First, there is a **cross-shaped** understanding of Scripture. Where much of the medieval period was characterized, particular in its last few centuries, by moralizing works such as the preaching manual, *Fasiculus Morum (A Bundle of Virtues)*, exploring the seven deadly sins, the Reformation centered its biblical interpretation around the cross and its historical-redemptive ramifications. The Bible for them was about God's redemption, not just his creation. It was also cross-shaped because the Reformers understood the radical divide between the fallen world and a gracious God, a world only bridged by the cross.

The magisterial reformers also promoted an ecclesiology that was irreducibly **connectional**. In yesterday's world, this was a mainstream assumption. It was only the disenfranchised Anabaptists that championed separatism in the 16th century, and following that, their collaboration with English Puritan exiles in the Netherlands in the following century that led to English separatist churches. Aside from a very few Anabaptists, the Reformation was characterized by connectional churches that were committed to the necessary and deliberate interconnectivity of visible bodies of believers. These connections did not stop at the border but in particular with Reformed churches extended **internationally** and **interdependently**. These were mutually supportive ministries that served as visible affirmations that every people group and culture were being transformed by Christ in such a way that each contributed indispensably to the universal sanctification and holiness of the entire Church.

These connections extended interpersonally to be sure, but they were driven primarily church-to-church. Unlike so much of modern day evangelicalism, the Reformation was **church-based** and **church-driven**. This orientation is imperative. Western voluntarism has many good sides. In its missiological expression, it was necessary in generating the missionary movements of the 19th century. Voluntarism expressed as evangelicalism kept the vitality of the church alive in late 20th century Europe, a time which saw the compromise and impotency of so much of the visible church. Voluntarism also has a dark side. Wedded to contemporary Western philosophy, it also can serve as an expression of the idolatry of autonomy or individualism. It denies the essential oneness, apostolicity, and catholicity of the faith, something that only the church can truly exemplify. Once we grasp this, we can begin to see just how essential is a connected, interdependent and international church, and how insufficient is a Christianity driven by the parachurch or anthropologically driven ecclesiology. We need the church.

Under girding all of these Reformational values was one foundational orientation. At its best, the Reformation was an expression of **grace-saturation**. This was not a program. It was a fundamental instinct, implanted with regeneration, that convicted the church that God would use every experience and means to expose our fallen ways and idolatry, overturn them and transform the Body of Christ, individually and corporately into true image bearers of Christ. In a sense, it was a belief that God would truly save those whom he chose to freely love, a choice that only reflected his

own character and not any quality found in us. It meant trusting God in every aspect of life, encompassing self, family, church, and society.

A New Heavens and New Earth: Worldwide Christianity

We really are living in a new, rapidly changing world. It is a far cry from Reformation and post-Reformation Europe. Europe continues to reel from a full-scale assault on the church. Such is the legacy of secularism. Nevertheless, it is likely that the secular grip on European life cannot continue unabated. The introduction of new peoples not exhausted by religion, particularly Islam, will change the dynamic. “Religion will increasingly penetrate the public sphere, a tendency driven largely by the presence of Islam in different parts of Europe.”^{xlii}

The rise of cosmopolitanism: This is a transient period in many ways. On a purely physical level, it marks a new massive wave of immigration. Approximately 140 million people now live outside of their birth countries. The movements of millions of peoples are propelled at increasing rates in this age of globalization. Reasons for the movements are not hard to find. As European population rates decline, a vacuum is created. Basic infrastructure, essential for the distribution of goods and services depends on an adequate tax base, a healthy economy and a sufficient labor force. The decline of European population is, over time, devastating and cannot be compensated for apart from immigration. Looking at things from the other side of the coin, immigration to the Western world is encouraged by the proliferation of failed states; societies in which basic needs, to include security; freedom and opportunity are either denied or insufficient.

The fact that European Christianity has declined in the modern period should not mask a more promising fact. While the traditional centres of Christian vitality, the champions of the age of missions wallow in a late modern malaise; their mission fields do not. Phillip Jenkins sites statistics that make the point. While 820 million professing Christians reside in Europe and North America, 480 million live in South America, 360 million in Africa, and a further 313 million live in Asia. In other words, significantly more Christians live outside the Medieval and Early Modern heart of Christianity than within it. Furthermore, they do not all remain at home. While the media concentrates on the global immigration of Muslims, millions of Christians also migrate west. Recent immigration of Christians has not only arrested the decline of the church in the Netherlands, but that country’s Christian population is now growing for the first time in many decades and at a greater rate than Islam.

These new Christians are a great blessing to the entire church. Not only do they mark the thriving of the gospel in lands traditionally hostile to it, they also reflect God’s intentions to bless not curse Europe and America. Where the nations once reminded God’s people of the fall, they now remind us of the promise of a new heavens and a new earth. The immigrant church therefore represents a new kind of Reformation in its early stage of realization. As these new believers assimilate into their new communities, they do not leave their faith at the door. Often this is confrontational, because these new believers are typically characterized by far more conservative social practices and a rigorous evangelicalism that is at odds with the assimilated liberalism of many of their hosts. To be sure, it is not smooth sailing. The new

believers are far more charismatic on average and many retain spiritualities that reflect folk rather than Christian origins. Nevertheless, they do serve to bring the church back to both a more exclusive dependence on Scripture as one, complete, divinely inspired text and to an uncompromising identity as the church in confrontation to the world. This matching of old and new Christianity offers great hope for revitalizing the church in the West. This will only happen however when the two Christianities support one another as interdependent siblings. They need each other.

Rejuvenating Grand Tradition Christianity

What we have spoken about has been the rejuvenating of Grand Tradition Christianity through the interdependent union of old and new Christian communities in places such as Europe. Mark Noll, the church historian concentrates on what this will mean for the theologians and scholars, but his conclusions apply across the board. The endeavor is “frankly a huge task that will require tough-minded engagement with modern, intellectual culture, fresh study of scripture that proceeds somewhat independently of the guild of biblical scholarship, open and faithful discussions across denominational boundaries with other serious-minded and traditionally oriented Christians, and rededication to harvesting the fruits of church history.”^{xliii} The scale of this project will require a church that is united around a similar self-concept, international, covenantal, Reformational, and interdependent. It is the church that John described in the Revelation, militant, faithful, sacrificial, united and diverse.

This is the sort of heritage that the International Presbyterian Church seeks to embrace and cultivate. We have a common tradition in apostolicity and Reformation, a common identity in bring martyr-witnesses worshiping the Lamb, a common mission in the transformation of the world, a common hope in the heavenly city, divine cosmopolitanism, the new Jerusalem, a common challenge, Europe, and a new common imperative, the equipping of the worldwide church for mutually supportive, interdependent mission. It is now our common calling and our greatest hope, Christ for the life of the world.

This identity has to drive our ministries and mission. It must drive us to internationalize everything we do, not because it is politically correct or because it matches the realities of modern day European demographics, but because it is who we are. Because we are Presbyterians, we are also connectional by nature. This is not to ignore the Scottish Reformation's conviction that the Church is often reformed one church and one location at a time.^{xliv} We know that ministry must take place at the local level. This pragmatic concern, however, should not mask the essence of the church nor blind us to the greater movement of God that is taking place in our midst. To be sure, these same Reformers already saw themselves as part of the same visible church. This allows us to internationalize on different levels simultaneously. We can drive to do so on the local church level, through our evangelism, worship, discipleship and fellowship. This means making the effort to understand the difference between our own cultures and the Bible. It also means not focusing our efforts to reach the unchurched exclusively through homogeneous witness. We have to see the nations as blessings at every level.

Perhaps it is in God's providence that the French will be evangelized through their immigrants. It also means encouraging sessions of elders that reflect the makeup of

their respective communities. To be sure, we are not encouraging the forcing of an international “formula” on churches, particularly where no cosmopolitan mix exists. We do what we can to follow Christ and his ways. At any rate, internationalization can take place at the Presbytery level. This is an imperative. It must be one because as God blesses our church with growth, we can too easily fall back into conflating our church and national identities. In other words, if we get enough English churches to form a “national” presbytery, what will that do to our sense of identity and interdependence? The point must be that we learn how to form ourselves administratively for the sake of effective ministry **without** sacrificing our core identity and values. Even the hint of defaulting to pragmatism in this case will diminish the church. We must find another way.

We must also commit ourselves to recognizing our interdependence on one another. There are many means through which we can do so. First, we need to gain a sympathetic understanding of other cultures in our midst, whether they are the immigrant unchurched, immigrant believers or other cultures in the IPC.^{xlv} We need to encourage effective payer ministries that highlight both the needs and blessings of brothers and sisters throughout the denomination. In other words, we must break down barriers that make the other seem exotic to us. We need to shape committees internationally, so that we all contribute to the shape of the denomination. We must build up presbytery financial reserves so that less affluent parts of the IPC are not denied participation in the full range of denominational life. We must develop partnerships with other parts of the church, such as the PCA, EPCEW, Free Church of Scotland, other Reformed churches and other international bodies of reformed churches. These can be of benefit in their own right, but the web of resulting relationships can also provide resources that both fuel further church plants and develop ministries in existing churches as well as enable ministry collaboration between churches, IPC and otherwise. We must learn to take the time to write. It is crucial that out of our union come fresh theology, reflecting the light of God to the nations. We must begin to grasp, for many of us for the first time, that God is doing something remarkable and profound in our midst. This blessing must be articulated, both for our sakes, for our posterity and for the sake of all of God’s church.

Finally, we need to use the insight we have received from our identity to critique our own cherished values and practices. What does a Revelational understanding of the church do to our understanding of worship for example? If the apostolic church and the Reformation placed such a premium on the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, what does it say about our current practices? Perhaps another way of asking the question is, “To what degree does our current practice of worship reflect a reaction to either Reformation Catholicism or contemporary pragmatics?” Are we reacting to liturgical practices that we think our ancestors objected to, but also disregarding their own? How will knowing who we really are inform our practice of hospitality or leadership development? There are also larger fish to fry. This revitalized understanding of the church as a worldwide communion also should effect profoundly our understanding of the relationship of missions to the church. It implies that missionaries can no longer be afforded functional independency from the visible church, but should rather serve as ambassadors or liaisons between churches in different cultures. Last, if this study points out any truth it is this: we need to structure ourselves so that churches and church planting efforts in the different parts of the world must be seen as one integrated whole. All too often, different regions compete

against one another. This is a wholly destructive practice. The new Christians and the missionaries that serve them can no longer see work in traditional churches as either irrelevant or as competition for resources. At the same time, traditional, European and American churches do not have the luxury of ignoring what God is doing in other parts of the world. Our very presence as the church may depend on what God is doing in West Africa or Asia. We must find ways as individual churches and as a denomination to embrace that reality and have it transform our own ministries.

ⁱ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

ⁱⁱ See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

ⁱⁱⁱ Olivier Roy, "Islam in the West or Western Islam? The Disconnect of Religion and Culture" *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* 8.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2006) 129.

^{iv} See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Evangelicalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) and Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

^v See George Barna, *Revolution* (Tyndale House, 2005).

^{vi} See Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997) and *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006).

^{vii} See Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

^{viii} See Wade Clark Roof, "Reinventing Church."

^{ix} W. Tullian Tchividjian, *The Kingdom of God: A Primer on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005) 3.

^x Quoted in Timothy Tennent, "The Challenge of Churchless Christianity" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10.1 (205) 173. To be clear, Winter was advocating the possibility of Muslims etc., to remain within the religions of their birth. In other words, one should not have to leave Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc., just because Jesus is Lord.

^{xi} Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001) 125f.

^{xii} Tchividjian, 3.

^{xiii} Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2006) 21.

^{xiv} Chan 23.

^{xv} Chan 25f.

^{xvi} G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 29.

^{xvii} Beale 32.

^{xviii} Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993) 17.

^{xix} Chan 42.

^{xx} Chan 53.

^{xxi} Bauckham 71.

^{xxii} Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 613).

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- xxiii Baruch Maoz, “Multi-Cultural Churches-Possible? Workable? Desirable?” *Table Talk* Issue 19 (Spring 2007).
- xxiv Beale 430.
- xxv Thielman, 627.
- xxvi Beale 412f.
- xxvii Bauckham 84f.
- xxviii Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1958) 4.
- xxix Contra D.B. Knox, “What the Church Is” www.matthiasmedia.com.au 2004. See also D.B. Knox, “The Church and the Denominations” www.matthiasmedia.com.au, and David G. Peterson, “The Locus of the Church: Heaven or Earth” *The Theologian* www.theologian.org.uk 2005.
- xxx Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken and Mark E. Dever, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004) 31.
- xxxi Susan K. Wood, “The Holy, Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints” *Exploring and Proclaiming the Apostles’ Creed* (London: Morehouse, 2004) 219.
- xxxii Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1995) 93.
- xxxiii Wood 225.
- xxxiv Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1996) 27f.
- xxxv Chan 36.
- xxxvi MacGregor 72f.
- xxxvii MacGregor, 21. MacGregor quotes the *Confessio Scoticana*, ca. 1560.
- xxxviii MacGregor 19.
- xxxix MacGregor 16.
- xl John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Volume 2. Book IV. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 1024f.
- xli MacGregor 52. The author refers to *Institutes* IV. i.5.
- xlii Grace Davie, “Is Europe and Exceptional Case?” *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* 8.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2006) 33.
- xliii Mark Noll, “Evangelical Theology Today” *Theology Today* January 1995.
- xliv MacGregor 71.
- xlvi Maoz.

Note: Francis Schaeffer started The International Presbyterian Church (IPC) in 1954. A small denomination, the IPC nevertheless spans geographically from England to Azerbaijan.