

THE GOSPEL

a network for encouraging the encounter in North America & OUR CULTURE

ATLANTA 95 UPDATE

George R. Hunsberger
GOCN Coordinator

From the beginning, it has felt like a risk. Several people underscored that when seven of us gathered in Atlanta in August to give shape to the next GOCN consultation. If the GOCN is serious about having a genuine roundtable conversation about "the gospel and our culture" among people of diverse ethnic communities, it will change the movement. The "our" in the slogan will be a bigger "our." The range of "culture" experiences we are trying to deal with will expand. And in the process, the way we recognize good news in the "gospel" will be pushed into nooks and crannies that none of us on our own envisioned.

It has felt like a risk also because it pushes on the limits of routine experience in our North American churches and relationships. Can a network which has thus far formed mostly among those in the dominant euro-american stream of church life be believable when it suggests this broader conversation? Will its invitation be heard as genuine? There is something about these questions that tests not so much whether it is right for a mostly anglo movement to have emerged around the "missionary encounter of the gospel with our culture," as it does what kind of people

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THE GOSPEL IN POSTMODERN TIMES: A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

Jimmy Long
Intervarsity Christian Fellowship
Chapel Hill, NC

The Strike Zone Shift: A Postmodern Analogy

Things have changed in baseball. One of the things that has changed is the strike zone. If you ever watched baseball in the 50's and 60's you would see that the strike zone began at the letters on the jersey across the chest. In the rule book, it still states that the strike zone extends from the letters of the jersey to the top of the knees. However in today's game if you ever see a pitch above the belt it will be called a ball. Over a period of time, we don't know exactly how it happened, but sometime in the late 60's and early 70's the strike zone began the slow downward trend from the letters to the belt. Umpires are the ones who have brought about this change.

Umpires are a strange lot anyway. Recently I heard a story about a group of umpires who got together and compared notes on how they each made decisions about when to call a strike or a ball. The first umpire said, "I call them as they are." The second disagreed and said, "I call them as I see them." The third umpire told the other two, "You are both wrong, they ain't nothing until I call them." These three umpires demonstrate how the strike zone began its downward slide.

This shift is not just in baseball. This shift in baseball's strike zone is analogous to a major societal paradigm shift in society. The three umpires represent this societal shift. The first umpire represents the naive realist who believes that he knows what is right and wrong and can determine that by himself. The second umpire is more of a subjective realist. He admits that his view of the strike zone will vary from day to day depending on how he is feeling any given day. A lot of baseball players today think that all umpires live under subjective reality and even change between innings. The third umpire lives in what we should call virtual reality. There is no truth or falsehood, only choices.

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we are and are becoming as we try to respond faithfully. After all, many third world and Western minority leaders have been waiting a long time for white Westerners to get it! The question is, will our new discoveries about the missionary nature of the church in its North American situation be played out with consistency? Will these discoveries lead us to genuine relationships across ethnic lines that are more and more dividing our society and have too long divided us in the church.

So the risk factor rides on two things. People of a variety of ethnic streams will join the conversations in Atlanta because of people they know and trust in the context of ongoing relationships. Second, multiple ethnic communities will gather as the Holy Spirit gathers us. The meeting cannot be manufactured. It will be based on trust in each other and dependence on the Spirit, or it will fail to materialize.

There is evidence that the Spirit is not letting this one alone. That is particularly evident as a team of people prepares to give leadership to the meeting. Those giving voice to ways their ethnic communities experience the challenge to maintain fidelity to the gospel include Marsha Snulligan Haney, a professor at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta; Kil-Sang Yoon of the United Methodist Church office for Ethnic Minority Concerns; Daniel Sanchez, a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth; and Stan Inouye of IWA, a Japanese American ministry organization. Other invitations are pending. Anthony Bryan, a minister from Jamaica, will lead morning Bible studies from the perspective of a near neighbor from the Caribbean. A team of Alan Reynolds, Mary Motte, and Jean Stromberg and others are giving shape to our worship. Robert Schreiter of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago will help us begin the meeting by exploring a case study together. He will also serve as part of a listening and responding group which will help us at the conclusion to pull together the reflections and commitments emerging from the small group and larger group discussions which will form the heart of the meeting. □

POSTMODERN-continued

As few baseball people in the midst of the strike zone shift understood what was occurring, few people today understand this societal shift in which we find ourselves. I am going to try to give a handle that hopefully will provide at least some understanding of the overall picture of this societal shift into Postmodernism.

Part of the confusion today is that we are actually in the midst of two societal shifts, both of which are effecting this student generation. One shift is the generational shift from the value system of the Baby Boomers or Boomer Generation to the value system of Generation X. The other shift, which ultimately will have more lasting and far reaching consequences, is the philosophical shift from the Enlightenment Era to Postmodernism. There are many people today who are researching and analyzing each of these shifts but very few people are trying to understand the link between these two societal shifts.

My thesis is that to adequately understand these societal shifts, we need to realize that the shift from baby boomers to Generation X is a subset of the larger shift from the Enlightenment Era to Postmodernism. The Baby Boomer generation was the last generation to grow up in the Enlightenment or Modern Era. Generation X is the first "pure" Postmodern generation. If we are to minister to Generation X, it is extremely crucial that we understand as much as we can about the larger shift from Enlightenment to Postmodernism because it will effect the way we do ministry in the coming years. We must understand both Enlightenment and Postmodernism.

The king of Enlightenment was human reason. God was taken out of the picture. Humankind was all the reason that was needed to make sense of life. The queen of the Enlightenment was the autonomous self. The individual person was most important. As an individual you did not necessarily need other people. The princess was the process of scientific discovery. We came to understand things by trial and error, by cause and effect. Truth and falsehood could only be determined by the reasoning process. The prince of Enlightenment was human progress. Socially, society was evolving, always getting better. Like a solid European fortress castle, the Enlightenment looked like it could never be demolished. But if by the early 1900's you took a picture of a European castle built in the 1400's you would see it had been slowly eaten away. That is what is happening to the Enlightenment today. If it still exists, and it probably does to some degree, then it is on it's death bed.

The Shifting Sandcastle of Postmodernism: A Description

If you have ever been to the beach and built a sandcastle, you know that you can build a sandcastle one day and then return the next day and, without having done anything to it, discover the sandcastle to be very different. Either the sandcastle has washed away or it has dramatically changed because of the shifting wind. This picture describes the emergence of Postmodernism. As the winds of change blow over a period of time a sandcastle is slowly eaten away to form something entirely new.

It is going to take not just a few years, but scores of years to bring about this transition into Postmodernism. The time of transition brings about confusion, differences of opinion, and uncertainty. It does not bring about stability for anybody.

At least presently, what does this sandcastle we call Postmodernism look like? The four primary traits of the Enlightenment each have their parallels in Postmodernism. First, instead of human reason which leads to the truth, Postmodernism has multiple truths, which discourages a single truth. Instead of truth we are left only with preferences. No single Truth unites society so the possibility of fragmentation is very real.

Second, instead of the autonomous self we have tribalism or community. The community decides what is true. "The Real World" on MTV is a microcosm of tribalism at work. The show is composed of a group of people who are selected by the

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FALLING INTO THE EARTH: REFLECTIONS ON JOHN 12:20-26

Tom Boogaart
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

These verses serve as a threshold in the Gospel of John. Passing over them, we move from *chronos* to *kairos*, from Jesus' ministry of preparation to his manifestation of glory. Jesus takes a request of some Greeks, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (12:21), as a sign that the time of preparation is over. He says in what must have seemed a non sequitur to the Greeks, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). Jesus proceeds to explain what he means by glorification: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:24). In this bold analogy, Jesus suggests that the agricultural drama of planting and harvesting anticipates the cosmic drama of his incarnation, death, and resurrection. That is to say, he invites us to see in the autumnal corn rising out of Iowa hills a vision of the resurrection. Maybe Iowa is heaven after all.

Of the many things that one could say about Jesus' analogy, one in particular arrests me: *falling into the earth!* Both the grain of wheat and Jesus fall into the earth, and falling into the earth is a first step on a pilgrimage that leads to a fruitful life

Neither *falling* nor *earth* have positive connotations for us today. Falling is experienced as loss of position, balance, and control; earth as dirt, a compost of death. People in our culture want to rise above the earth, not fall into it. We see more eagles as totems for sport teams than we see worms. We all want to be sky walkers, borne aloft by colognes and perfumes, airplanes and air-conditioners, elevators and escalators, grand theories and eternal ideas.

Our airy souls and soaring intellects rest uneasily in our bodies. We deny in various and sundry ways our bodily existence. Our excrement and urine are whooshed away on white porcelain thrones with flowered air-freshener within polite reach. Aluminum chlorohydrate patrols our armpits for any hint of sweat and smell. An arsenal of whiteners and brighteners are found in any home to dispel the long shadows of grime falling across everything that we possess.

In order to follow Jesus, we, who are so much a part of this culture, have to stop and turn around. We must move toward the earth not the sky. We have to fall, return to the earth, and trust that when its dark soil surrounds us--in whatever form that takes--we will awaken from our aloneness to a life more fruitful and abundant than any we could have imagined. We have to trust that what happens year in and year out to the grain of wheat, and once and for all in Jesus, is *true*, that abundant life is our future.

Struggling with the meaning of *falling into the earth* in

John's text brought back memories of a trip I took to Mexico a few years ago and a vision I had there. Together with a number of other professors from theological schools in the United States and Canada, I spent two weeks in Northern Mexico. I had imagined in advance what the cross-cultural issues might be, but I never imagined that they would be related to dirt. I became keenly aware how dirt had ceased to be a reality in my life--at least on the surface--but was very much a reality in theirs. We spent time with the poor laborers hearing of their trials and triumphs. We met people who were profoundly bound to the earth, earthlings.

I remember meeting a group of men with wizened faces who had spent all their adult lives in huts along an alluvial plain. From morning till night they sifted the gravel of that old river bed through metal screens. At the end of a day they sold it to a local cement contractor for a few dollars. I cannot remember these fiercely independent men apart from the pits they had dug in the earth.

I remember visiting an old man with two fingers missing on his left hand. All his working life, he had dug clay from a vein in a field outside the city. He pressed it into a single wooden, brick mold. Five bricks at a time, he laid them out to dry in the withering sun. When he had enough, he stacked them around a pile of wood and sticks he had gathered and fired them. The hardened bricks sold for about a penny a piece to members of the emerging middle class building their dream homes in the growing suburbs.

I remember the desperate men, women, and children of Poblado Miguel Aleman, a shanty town outside of Hermosillo, Mexico. They picked grapes in the God forsaken fields of a Mexican desert and earned enough to support their hunger, a little over a dollar a day. The underground aquifer that gave what life there was to the region was nearly depleted. The grape vines and the town would soon shrivel up and blow away.

After our time in Mexico, we returned to a motel in Tucson, Arizona to process our experience. That night I showered, brushed and flossed my teeth, and slipped between clean sheets for the first time in two weeks. At some point in the course of that night I had a strange vision. I was sitting in my office at the seminary, but my desk and book shelves were bare. Suddenly, a lumbering figure appeared in my partially opened doorway. It had the form of a human being, but no distinguishing features. No eyes, nose, ears, mouth, fingers, or toes. The figure was earthen, and its complexion crusty. It moved toward me, and I knew neither what it was nor whether it bore me life or death. I was frozen in fear and confusion, and awoke just before it buried me in its earthen arms.

We have to fall, return to the earth, and trust that when its dark soil surrounds us--in whatever form that takes--we will awaken from our aloneness to a life more fruitful and abundant than any we could have imagined. □

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POSTMODERN-continued

producers of the show. The selection process to bring these 6 or 8 people to live together in a community is very elaborate. The daily experiences of this diverse group living in community are captured on video. By the end of the six months or so in which they have lived together in community, you see before your eyes this diverse group of people changed into a community which have much more similar viewpoints than when they began the show. They have a new sense of truth which the community has helped to form. This formation of communities is happening everywhere. These communities sometimes take the place of the families many have never experienced growing up.

Instead of the scientific discovery of the Enlightenment, we now have virtual reality. Virtual reality causes us to mix up what is fact with what is fiction. If you think about it, was it not crazy what Dan Quayle and Murphy Brown did to each other. On the one side we had "Murphy Brown", a fictional show, railing against Dan Quayle at different times during the year. On the other side we had Dan Quayle, the Vice-President of the United States, becoming very upset when Murphy Brown a fictional character, had a baby out of wedlock. In this whole process we are mixing up what is truth with what is fiction.

A short while ago CBS had a 25th anniversary special commemorating the first moon walk. As the narrator, instead of having one of the real astronauts narrating, CBS had Maurice, the fictional former astronaut on "Northern Exposure" in that role. During the special he was talking as if he was in reality one of the real astronauts. Today we live in a virtual reality world where we are having a harder and harder time distinguishing fact from fiction.

In the fourth parallel between Enlightenment and Postmodernism, human progress has changed to human misery. Instead of pictures of ever increasing wealth and prosperity, we are left with pictures of human misery whether it is starvation in Rwanda or AIDS in the United States. Even the celebrity atmosphere of the O.J. Simpson trial is filled with human misery. This misery brings with it people who are

desperately looking for something to give them meaning.

In the Midst of the Shift: Four Gospel Signposts

Why is all this analysis of the transition from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism so important as we prepare to do evangelism? It is important because we need to understand not only what the gospel message is but also what is reality for the people to whom we are relating in evangelistic friendships.

Let me suggest four signposts for the gospel in Postmodern times. Signposts are guides or beacons to help show the way. The first signpost is the *Christian faith, a right to be heard*. In Postmodern times we can now be participants back in the discussion. In the Enlightenment we were pushed aside because there was no allowance for proclaiming supernatural involvement. Within human reason there was no place for the supernatural. But now in the Postmodern world supernatural possibilities can once again be discussed. Human reason is no longer king. There is more of an openness to the supernatural. No longer can someone say Christians cannot be part of the discussion. Hopefully Christians will once again be bold as they enter into discussions where they were shut out only a few years ago.

The Second signpost is *Christian community, a light to be seen*. In a Postmodern world, community is the key to evangelism. Community has taken the place of the autonomous self as the environment in which people function and make decisions. As Christians we need to be involved in two communities. First we need to be involved in the communities of our non-Christian friends. To understand our friends we need to understand their communities which are the environment in which they formulate their reality. As we understand our friends' communities, we can better meet them where they are and care for them.

Christians also need to be involved in a vibrant Christian community. Hopefully our Christian community will be a visible light drawing our non-Christian friends to it. We need to invite them into our community. Because our

friends might be overwhelmed with a large group of people, the community we should invite them to is our small group. In the small group they can enter into our community and get to know our Christian friends. Hopefully this exposure to Christian community will cause them to want to discover that the basis for our community is Jesus Christ.

Before I go on to the third signpost, I want to caution us in this Postmodern world to make sure we not only help people enter into Christian community, but also make sure they enter into the presence of Christ Jesus, the king of Christian community. It we only convert people to the Christian community and not to the king of the community, Jesus Christ, we are doing nothing different from the rest of society.

Christian truth, a fight to be felt, is the third signpost. In the Enlightenment Christians were asked to leave the discussion because we were not committed exclusively to human reason. In the Postmodern world we are being excluded not because of our commitment to supernatural truth, but because we are committed to exclusive supernatural truth. As we remain committed to exclusive truth, we will feel the hurt and rejection of society. Should we expect anything different than the hurt and pain that Jesus felt? While we stand up for the exclusive truth, we must do so with a spirit of meekness and gentleness and not a sense of arrogance or superiority.

The fourth gospel signpost is last, but certainly not least, *Christian hope, a light to be savored*. People of Generation X have experienced so much human misery in life that many of them now are people without hope. One of the best things we can do as we relate to these folks who are not Christians is to give them hope. To accomplish that goal, we must first create an environment in which they can experience rest in the midst of all the things they struggle with internally. As we bring them into our community and give them rest, slowly we can start giving them hope. The hope we can give people is not a wish but an eschatological hope, a new viewpoint from which to live their lives.

We need to be people who as God's

ambassadors give God's hope to those who have no hope. If we do that we are beacons of light in the midst of a fog of darkness within a society in transition from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism. □

[Ed. note: An article by a GenX-er, Jim Anderson, explores this theme from the inside. See page 7.]

PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS

[Ed. note: With this issue of the newsletter, we begin a new feature called Pastoral Conversations. It will be a forum for pastors who are engaging some of the fresh points of vision that are being offered for the congregation. While these reflections will generally carry on a conversation with a particular book or article, they will not merely be book reviews. They will be attempts to grasp an author's suggestions about some aspect of being a missional congregation in North America and talk out how that fits their situation, noting what the implications would be for a transforming style of leadership. They will talk about what excites them in the author's proposals and what disturbs them, how the book gives them new vision and courage, and the practical consequences they see for their ministries. The goal is to bring about a healthy dialogue between reflective leaders who are trying to shape new directions for the churches and the pastoral leaders who share the struggles of those churches to be faithfully missionary in their life and witness.]

A PASTORAL CONVERSATION WITH WELCOMING THE STRANGER BY PATRICK KEIFERT (AUGSBURG FORTRESS 1992).

Kay B. Huggins
Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church
Rio Rancho, New Mexico

Hospitality is a key term for evangelism. Often hospitality in the Christian community is associated with friendliness, name tags, and efforts to make the other feel at home. Patrick Keifert directs us toward a much deeper understanding of hospitality as the process by which one's private world is

opened to a public world. Rather than providing a list of suggestions for making a congregation friendlier, Keifert suggests skill and disciplines for enjoining life among strangers. This is not an ordinary book! Here I read words which conformed to unformed ideas I held. I felt, as if for the first time, that my sense about hospitality was understood and affirmed. I have long assumed that strangers are God's peculiar offerings of grace. I discovered that same peculiar grace in Keifert's work. In this reflection, I hope to share that peculiar grace.

1. Public Worship in an Intimate Society.

The intimate society's ideological foundation includes: 1) valuing close human relationships, 2) achieving such relationships through personal effort, and 3) personality fulfillment as the purpose of life. Public worship also has a foundation: God calls the community to worship so that praise may produce enjoyment and the worshipping community may be incorporated into God's activity in the world. Obviously, the goals of the intimate society and the goals of divine worship clash. The society is concerned about self presentation and the avoidance of involuntary self-disclosure; therefore, people establish safe distances from one another even in worship where God invites them into community. Silence—rather than spoken words—is a comfort in public worship in an intimate society, because silence is safe; darker feelings and actions remain mute and thus unredeemed by the grace offered through common worship. Rather than engaging the congregation in mutual public activity—such as corporate confession of sin—those who lead worship in the intimate society are to expose deep feelings, so that others, sitting in silence, will have the illusion that they are participating on a profoundly personal level. The illusion will last as long as the boundaries are maintained by distance, dress, manners, and silence! But, of course, within such boundaries, there is no worship.

2. Undercurrents of Individualism.

Individualism establishes the basic

divisions of the intimate society. First, religion is private and separate from work which is public. Second, the world of facts and men is distinct from the world of feelings and women and children. Third, the public "God" is the great creator distinct from the private "God," Jesus, my friend and savior. In the intimate society religion, faith, values, and aesthetics are private matters, complicating the experience of public worship. Work, facts, men, the creator God, and public expression stand on one side; worship, feelings, women and children, the redeemer God Jesus, and private expression stand on the other. The dividing line is without convenient bridges.

3. Undercurrents and Liturgical Renewal.

Keifert suggests that our failure to be hospitable to the stranger is the unfinished business of liturgical renewal. Most congregations, claim Keifert, are stuck with liturgy emphasizing clergy domination and laity non-participation, or a liturgy privatizing holy space, community and God! What is needed, Keifert asserts, is a liturgical renewal which connects theological reflection and religious experience. The means of grace immediately available for such a connection is the stranger!

4. The Stranger and the Self-Giving God.

Using the worship practices and the hospitality codes of the Old Testament, Keifert builds a case for the graceful status of the stranger among and within us. In worship, Israel dwelt in the mystery of God, who saves yet disciplines, who creates and also demands justice, who loves and cannot forget the covenants made with ordinary people. Early Christian worship carried forward the links with the gracious God and the covenant community. Although the emerging Christian communities worshiped primarily around the meal table in homes—an intimate setting—the public nature of worship continued through the emphasis on hospitality to the stranger. Hospitality was a ritualized proclamation of the central teaching of Jesus: there is enough. Indeed, God gives more than enough, whether the

need is daily bread, forgiveness, healing, protection from evil, or life eternal! New Christians were in touch with God's generosity and shared that grace in rituals connecting their personal experiences and establishing their identity within the community.

5. *A Gospel-Centered Public Worship.*

In public worship, self-justifying systems are judged by the public announcement that in Jesus Christ God breaks through all systems holding humans in bondage. Jesus' death and resurrection create the possibility of the self reborn, no longer egocentric and self-justifying, but now a self-for-others. As an individual moves toward Christ, the bridge provided by the church is the public announcement of the gospel in word, deed, and ritual.

6. *Liturgical Evangelism.*

Keifert now begins the "position" part of his book: from this chapter on, his agenda, a specific renewal of ritual, will guide the presentation of material. Since I did not agree with his outcomes, I felt manipulated as I read Chapters 6 - 10. Yet, the stunning statements continue, as in: The modern undercurrent to keep worship as private as possible is contrary to the corrective influence of the stranger. When others must become as the group, then the power of the all loving God is diminished. However, when the stranger is present, the amazing grace of God is known in fact and in deed.

7. *Ritual as Hospitality.*

Keifert makes remarkable suggestions about architecture, spontaneity, ritualized intimacy; over all he hangs a banner, "pretension to intimacy reduces sociability." The key for Keifert is the ability of the stranger to participate. When time and space are public, and the common code clearly presented and understood, the stranger can move comfortably into the public worship, fearing neither self-consciousness nor shame.

8. *Ritual Strategies.*

Keifert defines ritual as the process of guiding people from a private religious experience to a public identity in Christ. Therefore, ritual should be local, well ordered, anchored in Christian identity, and inclusive for all who confess faith in Christ Jesus or who are seeking such a faith.

9. *A Public Imagination.*

Imagination is the necessary ingredient in ritual design! Four realities must be acknowledged: 1) the local expression of social behavior, 2) the physical statement of building and environment, 3) the indicators of believability, and 4) creation of an audience connected to God through the gospel.

10. *Planning Public Worship.*

Imagination becomes critical theological reflection when the metaphors of communication are evaluated and tested by

the truth of the gospel; this is the work of worship planners. The process begins in attending to the given (begin where you are!), asserting the content, deciding—in the face of ambiguity—the presentation and acting out the good news in the particularities of a local setting, which will always be a company of strangers invited together by a gracious God.

Implications for Ministry

1. Friendliness replaced by Hospitality. Most congregational leaders travel and have the opportunity for visiting other congregations. Such experience as "stranger" may provide an entry point for congregational self examination: are we hospitable or merely friendly? The development of ritual words and deeds to extend hospitality might, however, be more challenging than recognizing the need for such public, common links between "family" and "stranger." Keifert does not offer these links feeling, rather, that they must be local and specific!
2. Courage to tell the truth. The church must step out of the private-public split if it is to be the church of Jesus Christ. Just as aesthetic, moral, and rational standards do exist as public and private, so does our spiritual truth as Christians. Keifert encourages congregations to move beyond "everyone has a right to their own belief" to the declaration of the truth of God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not a matter of personal taste—it is the powerful fact of God's redemption of the world.
3. Imagination brings life to worship. The pattern of the gospel story reverberates through the contemporary world; the church's unique responsibility is to capture the "vibrations" of the culture which best carry the gospel. This implies more than breathing fresh air into dusty Biblical images. Keifert suggests that new metaphors and images are necessary . . . and that these must be local and particular. □

NETWORKINGS

■ In addition to the GOCN listserve on Internet (gocn@calvin.edu), members of the network may be interested in a new listserve operating out of the UK. It is called "postmodern-christian" and describes itself as: "An emerging community of researchers and practitioners exploring cultural and theological issues raised by postmodern society and Christian faith. Theology, culture, technology, the arts and church history are all relevant to discussions on how theology, worship and community should respond." Internet users may become part of the group by sending the following message to mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk: "join postmodern-christian <firstname> <lastname> (carriage return) stop". Messages to the group discussion may then be sent to postmodern-christian@mailbase.ac.uk. (The message to leave the listserve is "leave postmodern-christian".)

■ [The following announcement was received from the Gospel and Our Culture movement in the UK to keep us abreast of developments there.]

Dear friends in the U.S.A.,

I am writing to inform you of an important development in the work of *The British Gospel and our Culture* movement. At the end of last month the management group agreed to a merger with *The C.S. Lewis Centre*. The legal name of the new body will remain *The Gospel and our Culture* but for general purposes it will be known as *Gospel and Culture*.

In addition to an excellent journal, *Leading Light*, *The C.S. Lewis Centre* brings with it an established publishing programme (in conjunction with SPCK), a growing programme of regional day conferences, workshops and seminars, and a commitment to educating Christians for mission in our culture.

The main change for the time being is that I am standing down as Coordinator, enabling Dr. Andrew Walker to become the new Director. All correspondence should now be addressed to him at:

Department for Educational Studies
King's College London
Cornwall House Annexe
Waterloo Road
London, SE1 8TX, U.K.

The public announcement of the merger was made at the annual lecture of *The C.S. Lewis Centre* on Thursday, 20th October.

I do hope you will continue to support the Gospel and our Culture as it enters into this exciting new phase of its existence in the U.K.

Yours sincerely,

Laurence Osborn
Ridley Hall
Cambridge, U.K.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN X-PERIENCED?

Jim Anderson
Logos House
Salem, Oregon

Christianity Today recently printed a rather longish article on those of us who

have been dubbed "Generation X"— anyone born between roughly 1963 and 1977. We are also known by the names "baby busters", "slackers", or simply "GenX". Half of us have been brought up in homes where our parents are divorced. All of us have been brought up under the specter of massive national debt, increasing crime, increasing pollution, increasing population, and ubiquitous media to play these stories to us over and over again. We are the first generation to grow up seeing and using computers everywhere in our daily lives. We may not know what they are called, but nearly all of us know how to use hypertext links, whereby when reading some text on a computer, a differently colored or underlined word indicates that we can use the computer's mouse pointer to click on it to see more information on that particular subject. This approach presents information as a web of interconnected elements, rather than as a logical linear sequence. The article in *Christianity Today* was very logical-linear-sequential. This article is not. Rather it is a series of images and thoughts which attempt to portray pieces of a GenX world view, some problems and concerns, and some hope for X-ers and those who care about us.

The typical GenX-er as portrayed in the comic strip "Doonsbury" is a barely literate "slacker" with no interest in any of the world's "real" issues. The assumption seems to be "if today's 20-somethings cared about anything, they would be holding protests like we did when we were their age." But this assumption is incorrect. GenX-ers are deeply concerned about "real" issues. However, the focus of the issues is internal, not external. We are more concerned about the abuses that occurred to us as we grew up in homes where our parents were emotionally or physically abusive, than we are concerned about the abuse that is happening to others in some far away country. Why should we be concerned with even its name or its location on a map, when really bad things are still happening to and haunting us? By the way, we don't think Doonesbury is funny.

We GenX-ers do not have the same understanding of the nature of Truth as

our parents. A discussion with one of us on the subject is likely to yield a statement like "Truth is whatever is true for an individual. Nothing can be true for everybody."

Listen to the words of 26 year old Canadian singer/song-writer Sarah McLachlan from her intensely introspective CD "Fumbling Towards Ecstasy": "Mother, can't you see I've got to live my life the way I feel is right for me? It might not be right for you but it's right for me."

I can remember as a child asking my mom about the meaning of a bumper sticker I had read: I wanted to know what it meant to "Impeach Nixon". Our earliest awareness of the world included the awareness that we can not fully trust anyone, whether they are politicians, preachers, parents or pop-stars. We are skeptics and cynics first. Trust comes slowly.

"No Fear" is a logo which is seen frequently on our clothing or cars. It is as if we are trying to remind ourselves that we have no reason to be afraid. "Scared-spitless" would be a more honest slogan for us.

G.K. Chesterton in his book "Orthodoxy" prophetically describes the intellectual atmosphere of total skepticism and irreligiosity under which we have been raised.

The complete skeptic says, "I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all. There is thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped." That is the ultimate evil against which all religious authority was aimed In so far as religion is gone, reason is going. For they are both of the same primary and authoritative kind. They are both methods of proof which cannot themselves be proved. And in the act of destroying the idea of divine authority we have largely destroyed the idea of that human authority by which we do a long-division sum. With a long and sustained tug we have attempted to pull the mitre off pontifical man; and his head has come off with it."

Chesterton could have been writing about GenX-ers when he penned: "And it's (skepticism's) despair is this, that it does not really believe that there is any

meaning in the universe; therefore it cannot hope to find any romance; its romances will have no plots."

How can the church meet the needs of a despairing and cynical generation? The Apostle Paul's approach to the church at Corinth would be very appealing to us GenX-ers: "I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Pleasant words are not enough for us. If there is a God, we want to see him in people's lives. But we need hope. What hope is there for those of us in Generation X? Paul writes in Romans: "We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." Adoption. Redemption. Hope. Salvation. How is the church showing these gifts of God to us? How are you, Christian, living in the hope that Christ has given you? Is it visible? Us X-ers are looking for it. □

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for information contact
Judy Bos/GOCN
101 E. 13th Street
Holland, MI 49423-3622
phone 616-392-8555
fax 616-392-7717

THE GOSPEL &
OUR CULTURE NETWORK
at Western Theological Seminary
101 E. 13th Street
Holland, MI 49423-3622

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