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THE MINISTRY OF DAN KIMBALL:
A MODEL FOR REACHING EMERGING GENERATIONS

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APPROVAL SHEET

THE MINISTRY OF DAN KIMBALL:
A MODEL FOR REACHING EMERGING GENERATIONS

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To Lydia,
my bride, my love, my life partner

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECM	Emerging Church Movement
IMB	International Mission Board
NAMB	North American Mission Board
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SBTS	The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
SCBC	Santa Cruz Bible Church
VFC	Vintage Faith Church
YLN	Young Leaders Network

PREFACE

Though this work bears my name, I could not have completed this task without the help and support of many others. Dean Charles Lawless, my supervising professor, not only challenged me to think critically and correctly, but more importantly served as a role model in exemplifying godliness. Professors Timothy Beougher and Theodore Cabal likewise provided valuable counsel and continual encouragement. I am grateful to all three of these men for their investment in my academic development.

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Finally, I am amazed and humbled by the grace of God that provided me the opportunity, the means, and the strength to complete this task. Only by His grace, and only in His power am I privileged to do anything for Him. To Him alone be the glory.

Blake T. Ring

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The United States is becoming an ever increasing “post-Christian” society. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the percentage of self-identified Christians in the United States has fallen ten percentage points since 1990, from 86 to 76 percent.¹ This study demonstrates statistically what Christian leaders have suspected for years: Christianity in America is deteriorating. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, responded to the ARIS study in an interview with *Newsweek* magazine, stating,

A remarkable culture-shift has taken place around us. The most basic contours of American culture have been radically altered. The so-called Judeo-Christian consensus of the last millennium has given way to a post-modern, post-Christian, post-Western cultural crisis which threatens the very heart of our culture.²

One could argue the church’s influence within the United States is diminishing and losing ground to the seemingly more attractive voice of contemporary culture.³

¹“American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008 Summary Report,” *American Religious Identification Survey* (March 2009) [on-line]; accessed 10 March 2010; available from http://www.americanreligiousurvey-aris.org/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf; Internet.

²Jon Meacham, “The End of Christian America,” *Newsweek.com* (13 April 2009) [on-line]; accessed 25 February 2010; available from <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/04/03/the-end-of-christian-america.html>; Internet.

³From 1990 to 2005, the number of church attendees remained constant (estimated fifty-two million); however, the percentage of church attendees has decreased due to the population growth in the United States. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Data- of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 26.

Emerging generations, a designation employed by Dan Kimball to describe younger generations, view the North American church and the Bible with growing skepticism.⁴ In fact, only three percent of sixteen to twenty-nine-year-olds “having a good impression” of evangelicals.⁵ Research also reveals that despite an overall negative disposition towards organized religion, emerging generations maintain a high level of interest in spiritual matters.⁶ Emerging generations are not becoming less spiritual; they are simply expressing their spirituality differently. This variation in spiritual expression, as Mohler suggests, can be explained in part by the cultural shift from the modern era to the postmodern era. The church is lagging behind in its understanding of these changes and its impact on Christian ministry; consequently, the church is losing influence and becoming increasingly irrelevant to young America.

Statistical findings support the assertion that the church is not effectively reaching or retaining emerging generations. Research collected in 2009 by the National Council of Churches revealed the majority of Christian denominations are in decline,

⁴Kimball uses the term “emerging generations” to describe those individuals, generally between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, who have been influenced by postmodernism and are growing up in an increasingly post-Christian America. Kimball writes, “Emerging generations don’t have a basic understanding of the story of the Bible, and they don’t have one God as the predominant God to worship. Rather, they are open to all types of faiths, including new mixtures of religions.” Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 15. *unChristian* demonstrates through research emerging generations’ growing negative view of Christianity. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Thinks about Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 24-26.

⁵This study also demonstrated that 48 percent “have a neutral impression” of evangelicals, while 49 percent “have a bad impression.” Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 25.

⁶In collaboration with Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer’s book *The Millennials*, LifeWay Research interviewed 1,200 Millennials, individuals born between 1980 and 2000. The research revealed a generation that identifies itself as spiritual but not highly devoted to practicing their faith in the context of organized religion. They write, “Millennials are the least religious of any generation in modern American history. Millennials are still spiritual. Three out of four Millennials say they are spiritual but not religious.” Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011), 47.

including the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention which have historically demonstrated consistent growth.⁷ Research gathered on the SBC demonstrates that baptism numbers have been trending downward for nearly a decade.⁸

A LifeWay Research study shows that most young Americans do not pray, do not worship, and do not read the Bible.⁹ A second LifeWay study determined that two-thirds of churchgoing young adults drop out of the church between ages eighteen and twenty-two.¹⁰ Reinforcing these findings, a Barna Group study discovered similar drop out rates.¹¹ Commenting on the trend's impact on the church, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons write, "Most young people who were involved in a church as a teenager disengage from church life and often from Christianity at some point during early adulthood."¹²

The disengagement, according to Kinnaman and Lyons, creates a deficit of young talent,

⁷According to the *National Council of Churches* 2009 research, among the twenty-five largest denominations/churches in the United States, four are growing: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Assemblies of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of God of Cleveland, TN. "NCC's 2009 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches Reports Decline in Catholic, Southern Baptist Membership," *News from the National Council of Churches* (23 February 2009) [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from <http://www.nccusa.org/news/090130yearbook1.html>; Internet.

⁸Southern Baptist churches were performing on average 10.01 baptisms in 2001. By 2008, that number had dropped to 7.74. Roger S. Oldham, "Just One Less Soul? We Hardly Even Noticed," *SBC Life: Journal of the Southern Baptist Convention*, December-January 2009/2010, 16-17.

⁹In the study, LifeWay president Thom Rainer is quoted, stating, "The research shows us that religion and its practices are decreasing and becoming increasingly privatized among the Millennial generation. With fewer people attending worship services or praying with other faith adherents, it is not surprising that the religious landscape of our culture is changing with the maturation of the Millennials." Bob Phillips, "LifeWay Research Finds American 'Millennials' are Spiritually Diverse," *LifeWay Research* [on-line]; accessed 2 July 2010; available from <http://www.lifeway.com/article/170233/>; Internet.

¹⁰Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2008), 2-3. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer provide commentary on the study stating, "While some churches are thriving, many churches are floundering. The average church is losing the younger generations, and those young adults are not returning. Churches that once were growing are now stagnant." *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 23.

¹²*Ibid.*

energy, and leadership in many congregations. The research overwhelmingly paints the picture of a church struggling to grow numerically, primarily due to its inability to attract and retain emerging generations.

A number of church leaders have begun expressing their concern with the state of the North American church. Researcher George Barna, who has grown increasingly disillusioned with the North American church, writes candidly regarding his apprehension. He warns readers not to place too much hope in the local church as it currently exists.¹³ David Olson's *The American Church in Crisis* provides in-depth statistical analysis that uncovers a church in steady decline. He writes, "The American church is in crisis. At first glance this may not be apparent, but while many signs of the evident success and growth abound, in reality the American church is losing ground as the population continues to surge."¹⁴ Director of Church Multiplication Associates Neil Cole writes, "American Christianity is dying. Our future is in serious jeopardy. We are deathly ill and don't even know it."¹⁵ As concern for the North American church spreads, the number of publications describing its current struggles grows.¹⁶

¹³George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 36.

¹⁴Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 15.

¹⁵Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2005), 91.

¹⁶The following works express concern with the current condition of the church and have been published since 2006. Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008). Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009). Brian Sanders, *Life after Church: God's Call to Disillusioned Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007). Wayne Jacobsen and David Coleman, *So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore* (Moorpark, CA: Lifestream Press, 2006). This outpouring of pessimism has garnered some pushback. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck attempt to provide balance to the conversation with their book, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

Searching for Emerging Generational Ministry Leadership

In the present milieu, the American church is tottering and in need of leadership who understand post-Christian America and emerging generations. Dan Kimball is one Christian leader whose ministry has proven seemingly effective in connecting with emerging generations.¹⁷ Kimball is a recognized leader in the area of ministry to emerging generations.¹⁸ Andrew Jones, a prominent voice of the Emerging Church Movement, asserts that Kimball's centrism and sensibility are unsurpassed among those ministering in emerging culture.¹⁹

Kimball has also experienced ministerial success in two churches. As Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger note in *Emerging Churches*, in the 1990s Kimball designed and grew a robust young adult ministry at Santa Cruz Bible Church in Santa Cruz,

¹⁷Demonstrating the effectiveness of a ministry is to some extent subjective. Claiming Kimball's ministry as effective is based on two primary criteria. First, his ministries at Santa Cruz Bible Church and Vintage Faith Church have experienced significant numerical growth. Second, his ministry, which includes his writings, is considered insightful and valuable by church leaders involved in emerging generational ministry.

¹⁸In *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, John Bohannon recognizes Kimball as a foremost expert in emerging generational ministry and as one of the four founding leaders of the Emerging Church Movement. John Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders: Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt* (United States, 2010). A free online copy can be obtained at <http://theresurgence.com/files/6x9-Full-Online-Ebook.pdf>. Kimball is an adjunct professor of missional leadership at George Fox University and Seminary. He is also the "leader of a new center [at George Fox] focused on the future faith of young Americans." This center is set to launch fall 2011. "Dan Kimball Hired to Lead New Center Focused on 'Future Faith,'" *George Fox University* [on-line]; accessed 16 August 2011; available from http://www.georgefox.edu/featured_stories/Dan_Kimball%20Hired.html; Internet. Russell Moore, Senior Vice President at SBTS, described Kimball as a respected evangelical leader and a leading cultural expert. Russell Moore, "How Unbelievers View the Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball, Kevin DeYoung, and Ed Stetzer," *AlbertMohler.com* (30 July 2009) [on-line]; accessed 1 August 2009; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/30/how-unbelievers-view-the-church/>; Internet.

¹⁹Andrew Jones, "The Skinny on the Emerging Church in the USA," *Tall Skinny Kiwi* (June/July 2008) [online]; accessed 1 July 2010; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/The_Skinny_on_the_Emerging_Church_in_USA_by_Andrew_Jones.html; Internet.

California.²⁰ Kimball's giftedness to reach young people in Santa Cruz gained him recognition and led to speaking engagements. Leadership Network, impressed with his innovative methodologies, invited him to speak at conferences on emerging generational ministry.

Following fourteen years of pastoral ministry at SCBC, Kimball launched Vintage Faith Church in 2004. VFC is geared toward ministering to those individuals inundated with the post-Christian culture so prevalent in the Santa Cruz area.²¹ The church has experienced steady growth since its conception and gained a favorable name in the community.²²

Kimball averages twenty-five speaking engagements annually, most relating to the topic of missional Christianity. He is a reoccurring speaker at the National Outreach Conference, National Pastors Conference, Catalyst, and Youth Specialties events. He also serves as an Adjunct Professor at George Fox Seminary, where he received a Doctor of Ministry degree in the spring of 2011.

Kimball is also a talented writer recognized for his ability to analyze contemporary culture for the purposes of reaching emerging generations. He is a columnist for *Leadership* journal and *Outreach* magazine. He has also authored and contributed to ten books. His first book, *The Emerging Church*, was published in 2003

²⁰Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 31-33.

²¹Santa Cruz is a community known for its resistance to the gospel and the church, making Kimball's ability to grow a church in this cultural setting all the more impressive. Andy Lewis, Senior Pastor of Santa Cruz Bible Church, stated that the Santa Cruz area is completely post-Christian. He stated that doing missions work in Santa Cruz is like "trying to harvest in fields of steel." Andy Lewis, email to author, 5 July 2010.

²²Vintage Faith Church was planted with a core group of 175 members in 2004. As of August 2011, the church's attendance averaged 875. Dan Kimball, email to author, 29 August 2011.

and addresses the changes occurring in North American culture.²³ Kimball challenges churches to reconsider their approach for reaching emerging generations in today's post-Christian context. This book is significant because it popularized the term "emerging," which would become a term widely used during the 2000s due to the popularity of the ECM.²⁴

Kimball's *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* seeks to answer the question of why emerging generations find Jesus attractive but view organized religion negatively. Addressing postmodern evangelism and apologetics, Kimball contributed essays in *Apologetics for a New Generation* and *Practitioners: Voices within the Emerging Church*.²⁵ Kimball is a recognized expert in the area of emerging generational worship. In 2004, he authored *Emerging Worship*, which addresses the philosophical and practical aspects of emerging worship.²⁶ He also contributed a chapter on emerging worship in *Perspectives on Christian Worship* and co-authored with Lilly Lewin *Sacred Space* – a

²³Apologist Josh McDowell offers the book high accolades in the endorsement section stating, "It would be foolish to be in ministry to emerging generations without carefully studying this book." Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). *The Emerging Church* won *Christianity Today's* award for best book on church/pastoral leadership in 2004. Scot McKnight, "My Top Five Books on the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today* (6 October 2009) [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2011; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/october/20.64.html>; Internet.

²⁴According to Brian McLaren, Andrew Jones was the first person to use the term "emerging" culture instead of "postmodern" culture; however, Kimball was the first person to use the term "emerging church" and played the largest role in popularizing "emerging" language. Brian McLaren, emailed to author, 6 June 2008.

²⁵Dan Kimball, "A Different Kind of Apologists," in *Apologetics for a New Generation*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), 29-40. Dan Kimball, "The Stained-Glass Perspective," in *Practitioners: Voices within the Emerging Church*, ed. Greg Russinger and Alex Field (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 196-213.

²⁶Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

book that addresses the philosophy behind the multisensory worship experience and includes practical outlines and instructions on implementation.²⁷

Furthermore, Kimball is worthy of study because he is passionately committed to reaching emerging generations with historical Christian orthodoxy.²⁸ Ministries geared toward emerging generations battle a heightened temptation to compromise truth for the sake of cultural relevance, but Kimball has demonstrated a commitment to a theology that is evangelical.²⁹ Kimball promotes a Christian faith built on both orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice), with emphasis on the former. While Kimball's influence is most prominent in the emerging church network, it continues to extend into other wings of evangelicalism.

Presuppositions Regarding Postmodernism's Influence

This dissertation is predicated on two presuppositions. The first presupposition is that postmodernism's influence upon North American culture is significant and

²⁷Dan Kimball, "Emerging Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson and Timothy Quill (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2009), 288-333. Dan Kimball and Lilly Lewin, *Sacred Space: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Multisensory Worship Experiences for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties Resources, 2008).

²⁸As the below sources attest, numerous ECM observers have labeled Kimball as an evangelical who preaches a gospel that is consistent with historical Christian orthodoxy. Trevin Wax, "The Emerging Church: In Retrospect," *Kingdom People: Living on Earth as Citizens of Heaven* (22 September 2009) [on-line]; accessed 14 October 2010; available from <http://trevinwax.com/2009/09/22/the-emerging-church-in-retrospect/>; Internet. Ed Stetzer, "Mission Shift: Introducing Dan Kimball." *Ed Stetzer: The Lifeway Research Blog* (17 February 2010) [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2010; available from <http://www.edstetzer.com/2010/02/missionshift-introducing-dan-k.html#comments>; Internet.

²⁹As illustrated in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, consensus does not exist on a precise understanding of the term "evangelical." Examining the spectrum presented in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Kimball is considered a "confessional evangelical," a position argued by Albert Mohler. Differentiating confessional evangelicals from broader, more generous understandings of the term "evangelical" is the denial of open theism and a belief that penal substitutionary atonement is essential for one to be considered an evangelical. Andrew Naselli, "Conclusion," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 213.

sufficient to warrant the attention of North American churches. Building off the first, the second presupposition is that North American churches need to respond to postmodernism's influence by evaluating the effectiveness of current ministry models and consider implementing new methodologies proven valuable in reaching emerging generations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Consensus by cultural commentators has not been reached on the extent or longevity of postmodernism's impact upon North American culture. Arguing for a pervasive, long lasting influence, Phyllis Tickle believes so significant is postmodernism's impact that it will force a major shift within Christianity – a shift she refers to as “the great emergence.”³⁰ Tony Jones agrees stating, “I strongly believe that the postmodern shift we are currently experiencing will be with us for a long time and that the world will never be the same.”³¹ “Everyone in ministry,” writes Brad Cecil, “not just youth and young adult pastors, will have to wrestle with this [postmodern] phenomenon.”³²

Less convinced of postmodernism's widespread influence over North America, Ed Stetzer contends “the shift to postmodernism has not happened everywhere.”³³ He claims “There are still large pockets in North America where people live out their lives in

³⁰Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and How* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

³¹Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2001), 11.

³²Ibid., from a commentary note in *Postmodern Youth Ministry* provided by Brad Cecil. Cecil, a prominent voice in the formative years of the ECM, launched Axxess in 1995. Axxess was one of the first ministries geared to reach postmodern generations. It was a ministry of Pantego Bible Church in Arlington, Texas.

³³Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 137.

much the same manner as their parents before them.”³⁴ James Parker sees the rapid demise of postmodernism as all but certain and a new “transmodern period” as imminent.³⁵ Millard Erickson suggests that North America is swiftly approaching “post-postmodernism,” a term he uses to “highlight the fact that postmodernism is also beginning to be transcended.”³⁶

The exact scope and longevity of postmodernism’s influence cannot be measured, but it likely resides somewhere between Tickle’s “great emergence” and Erickson’s “post-postmodernism.” What is not in doubt, as argued in Nancy Pearcey’s *Saving Leonardo*, is that postmodernism and other forms of secular thought will continue to influence emerging generations as long as songwriters, artists, television and movie produces, and advertising executives embrace the postmodern ethos.³⁷

This dissertation presupposes that postmodernism has made a discernable impact on North American culture, but what does this reality mean for the local church? John Hammett, considering this exact inquiry, asks an appropriate question: “Is it accurate to say that all churches must respond to postmodernism?”³⁸ The overarching

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵James Parker III, “A Requiem for Postmodernism—Whither Now?” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 307-21. Parker borrows the term “transmodern” from Paul Vitz, “The Future of the University: From Post-modern to Transmodern,” in *Rethinking the Future of the University*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and Dominic Manganiello (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998), 106.

³⁶Millard J. Erickson, “On Flying in Theological Fog,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 332.

³⁷Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Minds, Morals, and Meanings* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010).

³⁸John Hammett, “An Eccesiological Assessment of the Emerging Church Movement,” *Criswell Theological Review* (Spring 2006), 33.

answer to Hammett's question is "yes," but the level of response will vary in degree depending on numerous factors including a church's geographically location, congregational values and demographics, community's mentality, etc.

Postmodern awareness alone may be sufficient for some churches, but for others, postmodernism's influence will necessitate shifts in methodological approaches. Kimball challenges church leaders to survey their community's churches and see who is not attending church. He believes research will uncover an alarming low number of youth and young adults in attendance.³⁹ What is an assumption by Kimball is a definitive certainty when considering the consensus of church health research.

Thesis

As one surveys Kimball's ministry, three notable aspects emerge as contributing to his effectiveness in emerging generational ministry. First, a biographical study of Kimball reveals a man of humility who loves God and is driven to see young people connect with Jesus Christ and His church. Kimball's peers regard him in high esteem and believe him to be an outstanding person and pastor.⁴⁰ Kimball possesses a passion for personal evangelism and strives to live an exemplary lifestyle in this area. His evangelistic fervor is a strong motivating factor for his continuing to write and speak on

³⁹Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 42-43.

⁴⁰Doug Pagitt writes, "Dan Kimball is one of the finest people I know. I love him and treasure his friendship. If I were ever searching for a pastor, I would look for someone like Dan." Doug Pagitt, "Response to Dan Kimball," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 112. Mark Driscoll, commenting on Kimball's handling of biblical truth to various cultural issues, states, "Because I know Dan, I know that he regularly deals with these sorts of issues and replies with biblical truth delivered with the tact of a loving pastor." Mark Driscoll, "Response to Dan Kimball," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 107. Chip Ingram, who served with Kimball for thirteen years at SCBC, referred to Kimball as the most authentic, teachable, and humble person he has ever worked with in ministry. Chip Ingram, telephone interview by author, 26 March 2011.

emerging generational ministry.⁴¹ In assessing Kimball's character and leadership skills, it comes as no surprise that he played a significant role in the early development of the ECM.

One of the dangers of writing a dissertation on a living subject is that his or her biography is still being written. Many aspects of Kimball's life and ministry are subject to change. While research reveals an individual of high character, there is a risk that this impression is inaccurate or that Kimball's character may change. This dissertation also recognizes that all Christian leaders are susceptible to moral failure, and the consequences of such are most often devastating on one's ministry. Despite the fact that inherent dangers exist when writing on a living subject, writing on Kimball is a prudent decision at this time.

Second, Kimball's theological approach appears to communicate the Christian faith well to a generation that is skeptical of the church and generally unreceptive to institutionalized dogmatism.⁴² Kimball, with a humble disposition, promotes an ancient, deep theology that honors historical Christian orthodoxy, yet attempts to guard against the arrogance emerging generations associate with Christianity.⁴³ He desires to not

⁴¹In the chapter entitled "Why I Escaped the Church Office," Kimball speaks at length about his burden for non-Christians and the conviction he feels to reach them with the gospel. He challenges his readers to remove themselves from the Christian subculture which he refers to as the "Christian bubble." Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 36-49.

⁴²Spencer Burke develops the reasoning behind emerging culture's skepticism to organized religion in "From the Third Floor to the Garage," in *Stories of Emergence*, ed. Mike Yanconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/EmergentYS, 2003), 27-39.

⁴³Kimball uses language such as "ancient" and "vintage" to describe faith and ministry shaped by the early church. One of VFC's value statements is "Vintage Faith strives to reflect the ancient roots and values of early Christianity." "Vintage Faith Strives to Reflect the Ancient Roots and Values of Early Christianity," *Vintage Faith* [on-line]; accessed 21 July 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision/roots>: Internet.

present an irrelevant and stagnant theology, but one that is living, dynamic, and containing a hint of mystery. Kimball believes fundamental doctrines must be preserved; however, he also believes it is unhelpful to portray one's theology as explained with "little, wrapped-up, tidy, black-and-white answers."⁴⁴ He clarifies his approach in stating,

I am simply saying that I do hold to fundamental beliefs such as what is in the Nicene Creed and other primary doctrines of faith (the deity of Jesus, inspiration of Scripture, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, salvation through Jesus alone). However, having said that I hold to some fundamental beliefs doesn't mean that I stop exploring theology. I want to be continually discussing, learning, reading, and thinking seriously about all varieties of theological thought. I want to be constantly exploring which theological beliefs have changed throughout church history, which ones have remained consistent.⁴⁵

Kimball attempts to balance holding tightly to core beliefs while allowing for debate on those non-primary teachings which evangelicals have historically found disagreement.

One concern regarding Kimball's theological approach requiring further exploration is whether or not it encourages an appropriate level of conviction, particularly on secondary and tertiary doctrinal teachings.⁴⁶ Examples include his positions on baptism and the role of woman in ministry. Not expressing a strong theological conviction can communicate that Scripture does not speak with clarity on these teachings. One critic may be accurate in stating Kimball's theological approach may confuse compassion with compromise and humility with uncertainty.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 90.

⁴⁵Dan Kimball, "Humble Theology: Re-exploring Doctrine while Holding on to Truth," in *An Emergent Manifesto*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 216.

⁴⁶Kimball provides insight into his theological approach in stating, "I lean toward more historic Nicene Creed orthodoxy, and I still remain overall conservative in my theology. Yet I do allow mystery and exploration in some areas of theological belief." Dan Kimball, "Response to Mark Driscoll," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 41. Phrases such as "lean toward more historic Nicene Creed orthodoxy" demand further investigation.

⁴⁷Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, 237.

A third notable mark of Kimball's ministry is the consideration he has given to methodological approaches as they pertain to reaching and retaining emerging generations. He has provided insightful thinking on effective approaches to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching. He rightly asserts that methodology flows from theology, and practices should never conflict with biblical teaching.⁴⁸ Kimball is not a proponent of the Regulative Principle.⁴⁹ Instead, following the practice of historical Christianity, he believes methods should be malleable and evolve in order to relate to how contemporary culture communicates, learns, and expresses their devotion to God.⁵⁰

Kimball contends an effective ministry to emerging generations will simultaneously maintain the holy distinctiveness of the church and remain sensitive to what resonates in the hearts of people.⁵¹ As illustrated throughout church history, Kimball states, culture should influence the different facets of Christian ministry, including evangelism and discipleship strategies as well as worship and preaching styles.⁵² The level of influence, a topic to be addressed in this dissertation, is where Christians find disagreement.

Little secondary literature has been dedicated to examining Kimball's biography, theology, and methodology at this point in time. Most notably is John

⁴⁸Kimball, "Humble Theology," 222.

⁴⁹The Regulative Principle, most commonly associated with Christian worship, is the belief that God instituted in Scripture whatever He requires for the church, and everything else should be avoided. For example, the worship of God should include only those elements that are instituted and exemplified in the Bible. Further articulation is provided by Ligon Duncan in "Traditional Evangelical Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson and Timothy Quill (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2009), 109.

⁵⁰Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 297.

⁵¹Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 216.

⁵²Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 298.

Bohannon's *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, which examines Kimball's preaching methodology and touches on his doctrinal beliefs regarding salvation and the gospel. In *Perspectives on Christian Worship*, the other four contributing authors provide feedback on Kimball's approach to worship methodology. There are no other significant biographical treatments on his life and ministry.

This dissertation examines Dan Kimball's ministry, attempting to discover whether it provides insight for effective ministry to emerging generations. Focus is given to those elements of his ministry that are indispensable to his approach to ministry to emerging generations. Thus, this dissertation offers a biographical treatment of Kimball, explores his theological framework pertinent to his approach to emerging generational ministry, analyzes his methodological approach as it relates to emerging generational ministry, and offers an evaluation of his ministry. It also attempts to uncover the aspects of Kimball's ministry related to his ministry effectiveness in order to explore their implications for traditional evangelical churches.

Terminology

Due to the rapidly changing nature of emerging generational ministry and the general confusion associated with ECM related terms, it is necessary to provide definitions for key terms that will be used throughout this dissertation. Unless otherwise indicated, the following definitions should be applied to these key terms.

Emerging Church Movement. At the risk of reductionism, the ECM is a diverse group of churches exercising progressive methodologies and primarily attracting younger generations. Emerging churches are motivated by the common goals of being missional and culturally relevant. It should be noted that the ECM in North America

formed in the early 1990s and began to dissolve and become fragmented at the end of the 2000s.⁵³ This dissolving of the movement is evidenced by Kimball's moving away from "emerging" language, replacing it with "missional" language.

Emerging churches. Emerging churches are all those churches within the ECM.

Emerging culture. Emerging culture describes the diverse, post-Christian culture influencing emerging generations. Emerging culture's values, morals, and convictions cease to be rooted in a Judeo-Christian worldview. Emerging culture is widespread throughout North America but the pervasiveness of its influence varies from region to region, city to city.⁵⁴

Emerging generations. "Emerging generations" describes those who have been influenced by postmodernism and have grown up in a culture where the predominant worldview is no longer anchored in Christianity. Emerging generations are highly relational and have a general distrust for all types of authority, with many feeling hostility towards Christianity.⁵⁵ Kimball is hesitant to ascribe an exact age-range; however, he contends most are eighteen to thirty-five.⁵⁶

⁵³Andrew Jones provides an articulation of the ECM's history. Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church Movement (1989-2009)?," *Tall Skinny Kiwi* (29 December 2009) [on-line]; accessed 1 July 2010; available from <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2009/12/emerging-church-movement-1989---2009.html>; Internet.

⁵⁴Kimball makes this observation in *The Emerging Church*, 61.

⁵⁵Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 26.

⁵⁶Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 128. *Souls in Transition*, authored by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, provides one of the more comprehensive sociological examinations of emerging generations. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Evangelical. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines “evangelical” as those Christians, “transcending denominational and confessional boundaries, that emphasize conformity to the basic tenets of the faith and a missionary outreach of compassion and urgency. A person who identifies with [evangelicalism is] one who believes and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ For the purpose of this dissertation, the term “evangelical” is used primarily to distinguish those evangelicals who reside outside the ECM and within more popular, established branches of evangelicalism. Evangelicalism in America is an extraordinarily diverse movement; therefore, the term carries a level of ambiguity. This dissertation interacts primarily with those wings of evangelicalism considered theologically conservative and non-charismatic (e.g., Southern Baptists, Presbyterian Church of America).

Missional. This term takes on different definitions, depending on the theological leanings of the individual or congregation.⁵⁸ Churches possessing an affinity to historical orthodoxy interpret “missional” as being a church that is outwardly-focused with the goal of expressing and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. These churches equip congregates to be missionaries in their cultural context. Churches possessing an affinity to liberal theology interpret “missional” as being a church that is outwardly-focused with the goal of continuing the ministry of Jesus in bringing reconciliation and restoration to the disenfranchised. The former understanding should be assumed in this dissertation.

⁵⁷R. V. Pierland and W. A. Elwell, “Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 405.

⁵⁸Ed Stetzer provides fifteen blog posts addressing the different interpretations of the term “missional.” Ed Stetzer, “The Meanings of Missional,” *EdStetzer.com* [on-line]; accessed 16 August 2011; available from <http://www.edstetzer.com/the-meanings-of-missional.html>; Internet.

Post-Christian. Post-Christian is a term used to describe a society where Christianity is no longer the dominant civil religion. In a post-Christian society, worldviews and ideologies are no longer rooted in the language and assumptions of Christianity.⁵⁹ In North America, the terms “post-Christian” and “postmodernism” are commonly associated with one another because the postmodern worldview is supplanting the Christian worldview.

Postmodernism. Postmodernism, a philosophical development of the mid-1900s, is a response to modernism, which teaches knowledge is gained through empirical truth and reason. While modernism values absolute truth and science, postmodernism rejects the idea that reason and observation are the only means by which to gain knowledge. For postmoderns, persuasive narrative replaces scientific method and intellectual consensus is neither achieved nor desired. Postmodernism recognizes that knowledge is heavily shaped by culture and language; hence, postmodernists commonly speak of their beliefs as being embedded and contextualized in their community.⁶⁰

Seeker-sensitive. The term “seeker-sensitive” is commonly associated with a ministry approach, specifically a worship style, geared toward attracting spiritual seekers into the local church. This approach was designed to reengage younger generations who viewed the church as irrelevant. Churches adopting the seeker-sensitive approach became

⁵⁹This understanding of post-Christian is further articulated in Albert Mohler’s article “Transforming Culture: Christian Truth Confronts Post-Christian America.” Albert Mohler, “Transforming Culture: Christian Truth Confronts Post-Christian America,” *AlbertMohler.com* (16 July 2009) [on-line]; accessed 20 October 2010; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/transforming-culture-christian-truth-confronts-post-christian-america-2/>; Internet.

⁶⁰This understanding of postmodernism is further articulated in Heath White’s *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian*. Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2006).

known as “seeker-sensitive churches.”⁶¹ This approach was popularized in the 1980s, primarily through the ministries of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California and Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois. It maintained significant influence through the 1990s. In this dissertation, this term will be applied broadly to those churches adopting any form of the seeker-sensitive approach.

Seeker-driven. The term “seeker-driven” is used to identify those churches and ministries within the greater “seeker-sensitive church” movement that grant seekers an unhealthy amount of influence in shaping church ministry. Attempting to delineate “seeker-driven” from “seeker-sensitive,” Rick Warren writes, “While we must be sensitive to the needs, hurts, and interests of seekers, and while it is wise to design evangelistic services that target their needs, we cannot allow seekers to drive the total agenda of the church.”⁶² Scripture teaches that being sensitive to the mindset of unbelievers is appropriate (1 Cor 14:23); however, “seeker-driven churches” abdicate too much control to culture, resulting in the loss of Christian distinctiveness. Distinguishing between seeker-sensitive and seeker-driven is inherently precarious.⁶³ In this dissertation, this term will be used to identify churches and ministries who have taken seeker sensitivity beyond what is appropriate.

⁶¹According to Kimball, seeker-sensitive churches often removed “what could be considered religious stumbling blocks and displays of the spiritual (such as extended worship, religious symbols, extensive prayer times, liturgy, etc.) so that seekers can relate to the environment and be transformed by the message of Jesus. Generally, seeker-sensitive services function as entry points into the church, and the church offers deeper teaching and worship in another meeting or setting.” Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 25.

⁶²Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 79.

⁶³Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears exhort churches to adopt a “seeker sensible” approach where “a sincere effort is made to help non-Christians understand and experience the gospel” but the entire service is not intended to be seeker sensitive. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 353.

Traditional churches. Traditional churches are those evangelical churches whose ministry has been influenced little or not at all by emerging culture. Cultural contextualization and methodological innovation are generally not values of traditional churches.

Limitations of the Study

There are three notable limitations to this study. First, this dissertation had limited access to VFC's baptism, attendance, and membership statistics. VFC did not begin collecting statistical information until November 2010.

Second, this dissertation had limited access to Kimball's sermons because VFC does not record its worship gatherings. Explaining this policy, the church's website states:

Our messages are not currently available online. We believe that a worship experience is more than simply hearing someone verbally give a message. When we communicate in our gatherings, we regularly use images, artwork and maps on the screen which wouldn't be available with an only audio message. The speaker's body language, the community response and the prayer stations we create are also not captured in an audio recording. Since we value a holistic communication philosophy, the audio recording of a message on its own does not accurately represent our local community's worship experience.⁶⁴

Kimball did provide a select number of sermons for the purposes of this dissertation.⁶⁵

Third, this study delimits the parameters of its examination of Kimball's theology and methodology. This study's theological examination focuses on his doctrinal

⁶⁴“Accessing Our Messages Online,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 2 January 2010; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/news/series/online>; Internet.

⁶⁵Insights into Kimball's preaching methodology are interspersed throughout his writings, but a primary resource will be an interview with *Preaching Magazine* in 2007. Michael Dudit, “Preaching in the Emerging Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball,” *Preaching* (20 March 2007) [on-line]; accessed 20 June 2010; available from <http://www.preaching.com/preaching/online/04/November /feature1.htm>; Internet.

positions on Scripture, Christology, the gospel, and Ecclesiology. This study's methodological examination focuses on his approach to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching.

Background

How local churches relate to culture has been an interest of mine since the late 1990s. Early in my Christian pilgrimage, I recognized that many evangelical churches lacked a strong desire to connect with the world outside its doors. I often found myself considering how churches could more effectively engage their surrounding community. Consequently, my interest was piqued by the ECM because its concern for how church and culture interact. As I began a cursory examination of the movement, a handful of names surfaced again and again, including Dan Kimball.

My initial exposure to Kimball occurred in 2005 while working on my Master of Divinity at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I was taking a course titled *The Worshiping Church*, and Gregory Brewton assigned Kimball's *The Emerging Church*. My initial thoughts toward the book were skeptical, primarily because Kimball's approach to ministry, in particular corporate worship, was so different than my own. Painting, sculpting, and other artistic means of worshiping God seemed peculiar. The book's practical focus left me curious as to the theological convictions behind Kimball's methodology. Initially, Kimball's methodology seems faddish and to some extent adolescent. In retrospect, I think his methodology was so divergent from what I had experienced in traditional churches that I could not understand its value.

A significant portion of *The Emerging Church* addressed the epistemological shift from modern to postmodern that is occurring in our culture. Kimball's articulation

of postmodernism was one of my first exposures to these ideas. His views on culture's changing thought process were intriguing, but at the time I wrongly assumed that such culture shifts were not prevalent, perhaps restricted to no more than progressive metropolitan areas.

It was not until I entered the doctoral program at SBTS that I was once again exposed to Kimball's writings. This second exposure came through a colloquium led by Timothy Beougher titled *Postmodernism*. This course focused on evangelicals' response to the postmodern shift and its influence on Christianity. A great deal of the discussion revolved around the ECM. Kimball's writings and influence were discussed on numerous occasions. The class's consensus was that Kimball's theology was not specific enough and susceptible to cultural pressure. I believed Kimball's ministry to be some form of "neo-seeker-driven."

I attended the National Outreach Convention in San Diego, CA in November 2006. Kimball was a guest speaker, and I attended two of his breakout sessions. Despite speaking to a theologically diverse collection of church leaders, Kimball unapologetically articulated conservative theological positions of numerous fundamental doctrines. He also expressed what appeared to be a genuine passion to evangelism and missions. This positive encounter with Kimball propelled me to study the ECM and Kimball in greater detail.

In the third semester of doctoral work, I took an independent study course with my doctoral supervisor, Charles Lawless. The course focused entirely on the birth and development of the ECM. My research revealed Kimball as one of the movement's founding leaders. I also discovered that Kimball played a central role in popularizing the

term “emerging” with his book *The Emerging Church*. The deeper my research, the more apparent it became that Kimball was a person of significant influence in the area of postmodern ministry. Through my research of blogs, articles, interviews, and books, I began to notice common themes associated with Kimball. People understood him to be a genuine person whose approach to ministry was progressive in methodology yet conservative in theology.

A study of Kimball appealed to me for numerous reasons. First, Kimball receives respect from a broad spectrum of his peers, including those who do not hold similar theological convictions. Second, he is committed to historical Christian orthodoxy. This fact is more impressive in light of how many of the founding leaders of the ECM have moved, or are in danger of moving, beyond orthodoxy.⁶⁶ Third, his ministry focuses significant energy on missional living. With the North American church’s stagnant growth and wavering reputation, it is paramount that local churches place a heightened emphasis on evangelism. Fourth, Kimball has written extensively on the church’s relationship and reputation with culture. I believe it is important for Christians to understand this dynamic in order to interact effectively with culture and combat inaccurate depictions of the church.

⁶⁶Doug Pagitt and Rob Bell are two examples of emerging church leaders whose progressive theology has moved them beyond Christian orthodoxy. Rob Bell’s theological progression is illustrated in his book *Love Wins*, which garnered much attention for its denial of hell. Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York City: Harper One Publishing, 2011). Doug Pagitt once served at Wooddale Church, a non-denominational conservative evangelical mega-church in Minneapolis. His shift beyond orthodoxy is evidenced in *A Christianity Worth Believing*, a book in which he questions the authority of Scripture, substitutionary atonement, the reality of hell, and the depravity of man. Doug Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing: Hope – Filled, Open – Armed, Alive – and – Well Faith for the Left Out, Left Behind, and Let Down in Us All* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

There are at least two significant reasons a work like this one proposed is needed. First, postmodernism's influence on American culture is escalating, and its impact is not simply limited to more culturally progressive metropolitan areas. Consequently, a church that is properly equipped to minister in such cultural conditions is becoming increasingly important. Kimball, having studied emerging generations from a location where postmodern influence is significant, is able to provide commentary as an insider. He has also experienced numerical growth at SCBC and VFC - churches located in a community that is largely unreceptive to the gospel.⁶⁷

Second, the North American church continues to struggle to reach and retain emerging generations. The current trajectory of the North American church is not promising, and Christian leaders need to examine all biblical solutions. It would be unwise to assume the North American church's problems could be resolved by simply implementing Kimball's ministry model; however, his insights and ministry approach could very well aid evangelical churches in better understanding, reaching, and retaining emerging generations.

Methodology

This dissertation has involved an examination of the available primary sources of Dan Kimball. The James P. Boyce Centennial Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the E.M. White Library of the Louisville Presbyterian

⁶⁷Chip Ingram, who pastored SCBC from 1990 to 2003, said that demographic studies of Santa Cruz from the 1990s revealed that only five to 10 percent of residents regularly attended a religious service of any type. Chip Ingram, telephone interview by author, 26 March 2011. In comparison, Barna research shows that from 1991-2000 the percentage of adults regularly attending church in the United States floated between 42 and 49 percent. "Annual Study Reveals America is Spiritually Stagnant," *Barna Group* (5 March 2001) [on-line]; accessed 5 September 2011; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/37-annual-study-reveals-america-is-spiritually-stagnant?q=church+attendance>; Internet.

Seminary both contain works pertaining to this subject. Additionally, I have composed an extensive collection of Kimball's articles, blog posts, sermons, and radio interviews. I have also collected new member and leadership materials from VFC.

I first met and interviewed Dan Kimball at the 2006 National Outreach Convention in San Diego, CA. I also attended several of his teaching sessions at the conference. Since that initial meeting, we have communicated continuously through email, and I have also conducted three additional interviews, two by phone and another in person. I have interviewed family members, friends, colleagues, and influential persons within the ECM for the purpose of gaining their thoughts of Kimball.

Outline of the Study

This chapter begins with an examination of the landscape of North American Christianity, seeking to demonstrate that the church is struggling to reach and retain emerging generations. It establishes the need for exploring effective ministry models and presents Kimball's ministry as a possible model for effective ministry to emerging generations. Chapter 2 provides a biographical account of Kimball's life. His adolescence, college years, conversion, pastoral ministry, and roles in the ECM and contemporary Christianity receive examination.

Chapter 3 examines an evangelical theological taxonomy, or classification, of Kimball. Attention is given to his theological presuppositions and his doctrinal beliefs regarding Scripture, Christology, the gospel, and Ecclesiology. Chapter 4 explores Kimball's methodological framework. Attention is given to those presuppositions that guide his methodology. His approach to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching are examined.

Chapter 5 critiques Kimball's theology and methodology, ascertaining positive and negative contributions. Further consideration is given to the types of adjustments traditional churches might adopt as they engage emerging culture. Chapter 6 summarizes Kimball's involvement in the ECM and his contribution to emerging generational ministry, while also identifying areas of further study regarding Kimball's ministry.

Conclusion

Research overwhelming demonstrates the American church needs transformation. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer provide a foreboding forecast in writing,

The American church is dying. Conversions are declining in almost every denomination. Even in some of the more relatively healthy denominations, conversions to Christianity have stagnated.... Worse yet, the church is losing influence in culture. Local churches are having trouble relating to their local community and the younger generation.⁶⁸

The North American church is largely struggling and in need of spiritual revival, a renewed evangelistic passion, and a commitment to orthodoxy and cultural relevance. As Christian leaders navigate the waters of twenty-first century America, it is essential that biblically grounded effective ministry practices be identified and appropriately implemented. This dissertation asserts that Kimball's ministry represents a contribution in the area of effective emerging generational ministry.

⁶⁸Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 8.

CHAPTER 2

A BIOGRAPHY OF DAN KIMBALL

Introduction

The thesis of this dissertation is that Dan Kimball's ministry model represents a contribution in the area of effective emerging generational ministry. A survey of his life and work is essential for this thesis to be substantiated. Kimball's reputation as a leader in the area of emerging generational ministry is commonly known among those associated with generational ministry, but this survey will also seek to determine whether or not he maintains a commitment to authentic Christian living. Establishing Kimball's reputation as a godly and recognizable leader is crucial if his ministry is to be promoted as a contributing model for reaching emerging generations. Attention is primarily given toward a broad chronological reconstructing of his life.

Early Years (1960 – 1978)

Dan Kimball was born November 21, 1960. He describes his childhood in the Jewish and Italian influenced city of Paramus, New Jersey as the typical two-parent suburban experience.¹ His parents Skip and Jan, and younger brother Tom, provided a stable childhood. Kimball's parents, who would later become Christians, provided him

¹Dan Kimball, telephone interview by author, 10 May 2010. Unless otherwise noted, biographical information from chap. 2 was obtained from this interview. To ensure historical accuracy, Kimball reviewed the chapter and provided feedback. Dan Kimball, email to author, 12 April 2011.

little spiritual direction.² They believed in God, but a personal faith in Jesus was not present. Kimball's only encounters with the church until his college years were when his parents would occasionally drop the two boys off at a Dutch Reformed church.

Kimball's mother remembers him as a reserved adolescent who was gifted artistically. As a young boy it was not uncommon for him to spend hours drawing.³ Music also played a major role in his life, and in middle school he learned to play the drums. Kimball attended Westbrook Junior High School and Paramus High School, both of which are located in Paramus. Some of his fondest memories growing up were of friends traveling with him to New York City to attend concerts. Most of Kimball's friends were older and would have been considered "popular" among their peers. They drank alcohol and smoked marijuana, according to Kimball, but not excessively.

Paramus Park Shopping Mall

The first significant spiritual moment in Kimball's life occurred in eighth grade when he had his first exposure to an evangelical Christian.⁴ He and a friend were at the Paramus Park shopping mall when approached by a hippy-looking man in his mid-twenties. Kimball writes,

His hair was a little past shoulder length and he was wearing a tan fringe suede jacket on like a Daniel Boone character would wear. He abruptly walked up to us and without even saying hello, the first thing he said was "Do you know Jesus?"... In hindsight, I now understand he was "evangelizing" us, but at the time I had no idea what he was doing or any idea of what his motives were.⁵

²Janet Kimball, telephone interview by author, 11 March 2011.

³Ibid.

⁴Dan Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland: Discovering the Beautiful Mess Jesus Loves*, advanced copy edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 37. This information is obtained from an advanced copy of Kimball's *Adventures in Churchland*, which is scheduled for release February 2012.

⁵Ibid., 39.

The man opened up the Bible to the book of Revelation and pressed them on questions related to their eternal destination. The man spoke of judgment and hell, subjects Kimball had scarcely considered. Repeatedly, the man reiterated the reality that Jesus died for their sins so they could avoid hell.

Kimball recalls becoming fearfully fixated on every word the man read from the Bible. Eventually the man asked the young men to kneel and he led them through what Kimball now recognizes as the “sinners prayer.” Describing the encounter, Kimball writes,

We got up from our kneeling positions, and he then said something about us now being “saved” and really shook our hands quite strongly. He gave us a little sticker that said something like “I found Jesus”. Then he said a pretty quick goodbye and dashed off into the parking lot, sort of like a superhero who quickly disappears after a rescue. He left us standing there in the grass wondering what we just did, holding onto our “I found Jesus” stickers.⁶

Although the experience was bizarre, Kimball remembers feeling right about repeating the prayer. After the experience he became more sensitive to spiritual matters. He still struggles to this day to interpret what happened to him at the Paramus Park shopping mall. Following that encounter, his curiosity in the Bible increased, and on occasion he would read. He did not experience another significant spiritual moment until his college years.

Colorado State University (1978-1982)

Kimball graduated from Paramus High School in 1978 and subsequently moved to Fort Collins, Colorado to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in landscape architecture and urban planning at Colorado State University. An aspect of Kimball’s

⁶Ibid., 42.

studies that piqued his interest was how individuals interact with their physical surroundings and how altering a space's layout could drastically change how those in the space interrelate. This type of sociological research would one day impact Kimball's ministry and helps to explain his concentration on the importance of proper worship space organization.⁷

Kimball was introduced during his sophomore year to Mark Frauenfelder, who became a close friend.⁸ The two young men shared many interests including drawing, comic books, and music. Reflecting on their relationship, Frauenfelder stated, "I think Dan and I formed such a close bond because we shared many passions and we both had a similar sarcastic sense of humor. But what I remember most about Dan was his loyalty."⁹ Like Kimball, Frauenfelder was musically gifted. The two regularly played music together in local bars and clubs. Kimball's brother, Tom, moved to Fort Collins in 1981, and the three rented a house together. Shortly after Tom's arrival, they formed a punk-rockabilly band called the Elephant Boys.¹⁰ Tom was the lead vocalist and guitarist, Dan was the drummer, and Frauenfelder played bass and was the backup vocalists. The band experienced success and gained notoriety in the Fort Collins area.

⁷The most detailed explanation of Kimball's philosophy for proper worship space arrangement is found in *Sacred Space*, a book he co-authored with Lilly Lewin. Dan Kimball and Lilly Lewin, *Sacred Space: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Multisensory Worship Experiences for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

⁸Mark Frauenfelder would later experience professional success in founding *Make* magazine and the blog *Boing Boing*, which for over a decade has been one of the world's most popular blogs. Frauenfelder is also a recurring guest on the television network's Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report*.

⁹Mark Frauenfelder, telephone interview by author, 12 March 2011.

¹⁰Punk-rockabilly is a subgenre of music combining elements of punk rock from the 1970s and rockabilly music from the 1950s. Punk-rockabilly was first popularized in England in the early 1980s. Brian Cogan, *Encyclopedia of Punk Music and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 187-189. The band was named after the drama play *The Elephant Man*, which Kimball played a role in during high school.

Campus Ministry Worship Service

During his time at Colorado State University, Kimball regularly found himself pondering the concept of God, the after-life, and his experience at the Paramus Park shopping mall. Despite his living in a cultural context that advocated religious and spiritual diversity, Kimball's interest in Christianity grew. This interest prompted him to attend a campus ministry worship service.¹¹ He recalls feeling anxious about attending; in fact, he did not share his plans to attend with friends due to their skepticism toward Christianity.

Almost everything about the service seemed odd to him. His knowledge of Christian customs and practices was largely nonexistent. Kimball describes the encounter,

I had never seen such a thing. I have been to a lot of concerts, but not where everyone was smiling and clapping this intensely and singing all together. The speaker got up (wearing a pink gold shirt, of course) and was also so incredibly happy and smiling as he talked. As I listened, I noticed there was a lot of Christian lingo and rhetoric which I didn't understand. But I could tell everyone else did, as they responded with shouts and clapping to certain parts of his message. As I stood in the very back and scanned the room and saw the clapping happy people, all I know is that I felt that there was no possible way I could relate to this group, the meeting, the type of music, the clapping and singing, the pastels, and the cheery disposition everyone seemed to have.¹²

Kimball's discomfort resulted in his exiting the service before it concluded. The experience left him with mixed emotions. He struggled to see how he could connect with a group of individuals who appeared to be his antithesis. He believed followers of Christ to be genuinely happy, caring individuals, yet he perceived them to be disconnected to mainstream culture.

¹¹Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 44-46.

¹²Ibid., 45.

The awkward encounter at the campus ministry made a considerable imprint upon Kimball. Etched into his mind were feelings of uneasiness and apprehension. Unquestionably, the encounter would ultimately produce in Kimball a heightened sensitivity to how those unfamiliar with Christianity perceive and interpret Christian practices.

Lutheran Church Worship Service

Kimball's lack of connection with the Christianity he witnessed at the campus ministry was discouraging, but it did not deter him from continuing to explore Christianity. Although several years had passed, he continued to struggle in understanding what happened to him at the shopping mall and why the event kept drawing him back to Christianity. His growing curiosity led him to read Christian books, particularly books on the historicity of the Bible.¹³ Intellectual honesty was important to Kimball, and he could not accept Christianity as truth unless confident in Scripture's divine origins.

Kimball experienced an increased desire to attend church as a result of exploring the Christian faith.¹⁴ He asked a friend, Randy Briggs, to attend a service with him. The two young men, who shared the same degree program, had formed a close friendship through becoming study partners. Briggs, a confessing believer, was the only significant Christian influence in Kimball's life during his college years.¹⁵ The two

¹³Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 46. One of the first books Kimball purchased was Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidence for the Christian Faith* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1972).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 47-50.

¹⁵Randy Briggs, telephone interview by author, 4 April 2011.

decided to visit a Lutheran church that was near their dormitory. In contrast to the energetic campus ministry, the church service was solemn and the worship style liturgical. The pews seemed unusual to Kimball, for previously he had sat only on long benches at sporting events. The service provided several new experiences for Kimball, most notably, participating in the Lord's Supper. Although the service left Kimball with unanswered questions, the encounter was helpful because it demonstrated that Christianity can be expressed in different ways.

The experiences at the campus ministry and Lutheran church drove Kimball to continue learning. He amassed a small library of Christian books and developed a particular affinity to the New Testament, more specifically, the Gospels. He writes, "I felt a connection with Jesus' words and teaching. There was a lot about Jesus' teaching I didn't understand. But his words were haunting, the way he cared for people was incredible."¹⁶ Kimball's early interaction with Christianity and its followers was not the most positive; nonetheless, his fascination with Jesus propelled him to continue seeking.

Avoiding Caricature Christianity

Kimball's friends and roommates noticed the growing stack of Christian books in his dorm room. Out of concern, several individuals attempted to intervene in order to protect him from becoming a Christian. Kimball recounts one particular event:

One specific time I came home, and a couple of my friends were sitting in the living room. It was uncomfortably quiet when I walked in, and I could right away tell something was wrong. I think they had been talking about me as when I sat down, one of them said to me "We are getting worried about you and all those Christian books you are reading." One very good friend, out of deep concern explained how Christians have no creativity because the church won't let them be creative but keeps everyone homogenous under the grip of control and desire for

¹⁶Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 57.

uniformity. She feared I would lose my creativity and be brainwashed if I keep reading this Christian literature. It felt as though this was one of those interventions people have when someone is addicted to drugs or alcohol and their family and friends gather to confront them about it out of care for the person.¹⁷

Kimball's friends perceived Christians, specifically evangelical Christians, to be angry, homophobic, anti-intellectual, and narrow-minded. He genuinely understood their apprehension to his newfound interest because their concerns were grounded in perceptions and misperceptions he held previously himself.

The intervention did not keep Kimball from pursuing Christianity; however, he did vow not to become the type of Christian they had described. The intervention became a defining moment in his life on two fronts. First, he became more open to those in his life regarding his interest in the Christian faith. Second, he determined to pursue a type of Christianity that did not fall into the pitfalls that often caricature evangelical Christianity (e.g., judgmentalism, close-mindedness, politically-driven).

After Kimball completed his time at Colorado State University, he found himself in a state of limbo. His appreciation for Jesus and his teaching was growing but the desire to be a part of a local church was non-existent. He questioned whether he could sustain a faith in Christianity outside the community of other Christians.¹⁸

Travels to England and Israel (1983-1985)

After graduating in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture and urban planning from Colorado State University, Kimball secured a job with a landscape architecture firm in Boulder, Colorado. After a year, however, the punk-rockabilly band decided to take their talents to London, England, the city where the punk-

¹⁷Ibid., 57.

¹⁸Ibid., 59.

rockabilly genre of music first took root in the 1970s.¹⁹ The band never gained the popularity they had hoped during their year-long stint in London. Reflecting on the band's disappointment, Frauenfelder stated, "We went from being a big fish in a small pond in Fort Collins to a small fish in a really big pond in London. Even though our band struggled to receive attention, we still enjoyed our time in England."²⁰ Most of the time spent in London involved working short-term jobs, reading comic books, drawing, and playing at small venues.

Kimball committed himself to reading the Bible from cover to cover during his year in London. He writes,

Every time our band played somewhere I had a gym bag I would throw in my drumsticks, a towel, my hair gel, a couple cans of beer and my little brown Bible. I'd read it while on the train or the bus going around London, every moment I had I'd slip in some reading. I would keep that little Bible by my bed every night I fell asleep with it right next to my head.²¹

As Kimball grew in his admiration for the Bible, so grew the number of questions he had about its teachings. He recognized that his growing faith would be stunted if he did not develop relationships with Christians.

One of the most significant moments in Kimball's life occurred in London as he was on lunch break in one of his many short-term jobs. Near his place of work was a small evangelical church that offered a midday Bible study. The name of the church was Chapel of the Opened Door.²² His curiosity prompted him to enter the building and join

¹⁹See Cogan, *Encyclopedia of Punk Music and Culture*, 187-89.

²⁰Fraunfelder, interview, 12 March 2011.

²¹Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 62.

²²Kimball provides a detailed account of his experiences at the Chapel of the Opened Door in *Adventures in Churchland*, 62-70.

the study that included three senior adults. The circumstances were not idyllic, and Kimball confesses his instinct was to turn around and exit the building. The hospitality and kindness these three Christians demonstrated, however, caused all the anticipated awkwardness to dissipate. Kimball formed a special bond with an eighty-three year old man named Stuart Allen. His friendship with Allen would flourish in the coming months.

Kimball faithfully attended the Bible study for the remaining months he lived in London. He cherished each study for it provided him the opportunity to learn the Scriptures and ask questions in a non-threatening environment. The group members were gracious to Kimball, never demeaning him because he lacked biblical knowledge and careful not to prematurely judge his lifestyle in a manner that would compromise his growing enthusiasm to study the Bible. Kimball's perceptions, and misconceptions, of evangelical Christians changed radically because of the group's ministry.

Shortly following the initial visit to the Bible study, Kimball began attending church services. The church was small, averaging twenty attendees, most who were elderly. The services were simplistic involving the singing of a few hymns and a Bible-based sermon. The church adopted Kimball into their fellowship as if he were their surrogate grandson. Never before had the twenty-four year old witnessed Christian community. He writes,

This whole scene was the beautiful and rather eccentric mix of a young Guinness-drinking, punk-rockabilly musician from northern New Jersey discovering what it meant to follow Jesus with a mix of elderly, quaint and mature tea-sipping scholarly English saints sitting in this tiny musty basement of this tiny church in the banking district of London. But Jesus was our common bond, and I believe it was truly God who brought me into their paths, as my life would never be the same after that.²³

²³Ibid., 70.

Kimball's year-long expedition to London was life changing. In a short period of time, his view of the local church and what it meant to be a Christian was transformed by an unlikely group of individuals.

Kimball is not confident to point to an exact moment when he became a believer, but he feels it most likely occurred during the months he spent with the believers at Chapel of the Opened Door. The Elephant Boys decided to dissolve and go their separate ways after twelve months in London.

Kimball's hunger to learn more about Christianity later led him to spend several months in Israel. The purpose of the trip was to enter into deep study of the Scriptures and to see first hand the places Jesus visited. Kimball visited the Jordan River on his trip and was baptized there by a pastor who was touring the Holy Land with his church. Both Fraunfelder and Jan Kimball testify that Kimball returned from Israel a different person, one fully committed to the Christian faith.²⁴

Santa Cruz Bible Church (1986-2003)

Kimball returned to the United States in 1986, moving to Santa Cruz, California. He had two reasons for moving to California. Fraunfelder had taken a job in nearby San Jose, and Kimball's girlfriend at the time attended a university in the area. Shortly after arriving, he found work with a landscape architecture firm in San Jose, California.

Kimball also realized it was important for him to connect with a community of believers, yet he was unsure as to the process of selecting a church. He writes,

It seemed only natural that if I was following Jesus, I would want to continue to be part of a local church with others on the same journey. It felt like once I

²⁴Fraunfelder, interview, 12 March 2011. Janet Kimball, interview, 11 March 2011.

experienced and understood the beauty of being part of a local church, I could no longer exist as a follower of Jesus alone, without being part of one. It no longer made sense not to be part of a local church as a Christian.²⁵

Kimball turned to the phone book in order to find a church to attend but quickly became overwhelmed by the number of options and the confusing names of churches. He eventually settled on SCBC because its name was easily understandable and it was non-denominational.

SCBC represented a significant change from the church setting Kimball encountered in England. Unlike Chapel of the Opened Door, this church was large, averaging one thousand attendees weekly, and filled with individuals of all ages. Kimball described SCBC as a “typically Bible-believing Baptist church that played contemporary maranatha music.” Kimball assimilated quickly into SCBC and in a brief time was serving as the drummer in the worship band. In the span of a few years, the traditions and practices of the church that once seemed unusual to Kimball were now becoming routine and natural.

Kimball developed a close relationship with the Worship Pastor, Phil Comer.²⁶ The two entered into a mentoring relationship. Comer described the twenty-six year old Kimball as introverted, inquisitive, and surprising. He states, “Dan was much like the young King David. No one expected David to become a great man of God, but he did. On the outside, Dan appeared to be quite ordinary. But when you dug deeper, that’s when you saw that Dan was blessed with tremendous giftedness.”²⁷ Impressed with Kimball’s

²⁵Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 89.

²⁶Phil Comer left SCBC a few years after Kimball arrived. He currently is a pastor at Solid Rock, a large contemporary church in Portland, OR. He serves as the Lead Pastor at their Westside campus.

²⁷Phil Comer, telephone interview by author, 12 March 2011.

giftedness and commitment to the church, Comer asked Kimball to serve in several different capacities including leading the choir in devotions and serving in the college ministry. Kimball was appreciative of the opportunity and found enjoyment in teaching and mentoring college-age singles.

Kimball's early experiences at SCBC were positive; however, he did receive modest criticism concerning his outward appearance. One pastor requested a meeting, asking that he cut his hair and purchase a new wardrobe.²⁸ In a kind manner, the pastor communicated that Kimball's attire might convey an inappropriate message to other church members. The pastor gave Kimball money for a haircut and provided several Sunday-appropriate outfits. A bewildered Kimball left the church offices and immediately received a haircut deemed appropriate. However, after giving more thought to the situation, Kimball determined not to change his style and dropped the clothes off at a nearby Goodwill. The pastor would never again approach Kimball on the issue.²⁹

The encounter confused Kimball. He did not comprehend why Christians would judge a person by their appearance as opposed to their heart and faith. He was torn between submitting to pastoral leadership and not bowing to what he felt was inappropriate judgmentalism. This incident was significant in Kimball's life because it revealed to him the subtle, yet dangerous, judgmental attitude that can infiltrate the church.

The wrongful judgmentalism of the church continues to be a concern for Kimball. In *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, he writes:

²⁸Kimball, as is still true today, had a pompadour-style haircut and wore vintage 1950s clothing, a style derived from music legends like Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash. Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 98.

²⁹Ibid.

Though I stress that the church should be a positive agent of change, I know that it's the Spirit of God in the church who does the changing. I also fully recognize that loving others as Jesus would may mean talking about sin, repentance, and judgment, so I'm not suggesting that we only "love" people. But love involves relationship. Love involves time. Love involves telling people about God's abundant goodness and his "awesome works" (Ps. 145:6-8), but not just about his wrath and judgment. Love involves holding our tongues and being wise in the way we act toward those outside the church, having our conversations be "full of grace" and "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:5-6)... The more we focus on what we stand for instead of what we stand against, the more we will line up with Jesus and his teachings about the kingdom of God, and the more we will be seen as a people who believe in truth and love.³⁰

Youth Ministry at SCBC

SCBC's leadership recognized Kimball's unique giftedness in connecting with young people; consequently, they approached him about joining the staff as a part-time Youth Pastor. Kimball found it ironic because he had never participated in a youth group and had no training for such an endeavor. The church was confident in Kimball's giftedness and in his meeting the pastoral qualifications as set forth in 1 Timothy; however, they felt he would be well served by receiving theological training. Comer, who had received a one-year Graduate Certificate from Multnomah Biblical Seminary in Portland, Oregon, encouraged Kimball to do the same. Kimball, perceiving the Lord's call into ministry service, agreed and moved to Portland. He received a Graduate Certificate in Bible after one year.

Multnomah Biblical Seminary, a non-denominational evangelical institution, provided Kimball with a foundational theological framework for interpreting the Bible. His studies at Multnomah focused on personal disciplines, hermeneutics, and biblical

³⁰Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 112-13.

theology. Multnomah Biblical Seminary identifies itself as advocating a theologically conservative orthodoxy.³¹

Kimball joined the SCBC as the part-time Youth Pastor in 1989. Despite an average worship attendance of one thousand, the Youth Ministry's core consisted of only eleven high school students. Excited about the opportunity, he writes,

I remember seriously praying and thanking God over and over that I was asked to do it. I never imagined I would be asked to actually have leadership like that in a church. I was a drummer in a rockabilly and punk band who had been doing everything that most people in bands do – in other words I was not a typical church leader. My background was not a role model for teenagers by any means. So I was quite nervous, but in a good way, and I was also determined not to let down the pastor who asked me to do it.³²

According to Paul Sampson, Kimball's intern from 1990 to 1992, the church was fully supportive of his plans for the youth ministry. Those plans included an aggressive approach using culturally-edgy methodologies to connect with the unchurched youth of Santa Cruz. Senior leadership, also zealous for reaching the community, granted Kimball considerable freedom in shaping the ministry.³³

The youth ministry was originally structured to minister to students through two primary avenues, a Sunday morning worship gathering and weekly small groups. Kimball would eventually add a third component to the ministry in which youth could be partnered with other believers for weekly mentoring meetings. He estimates at any given time over 50 percent of students were involved in a mentoring relationship.

³¹“Our History,” *Multnomah Bible College and Multnomah Biblical Seminary* [on-line]; accessed 9 March 2011; available from <http://www.multnomah.edu/about/our-history/>; Internet.

³²Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 91.

³³Paul Sampson, a member of SCBC since 1986, has been a full-time staff member at SCBC since 1998. He currently serves as the Worship Arts Pastor. Paul Sampson, telephone interview by author, 13 March 2011.

For the worship gathering, the musical worship was reflective of popular culture. Brad Wheeler, a regular attendee from 1990 to 1994, described the music in stating, “The music was rock-n-roll-like and the musicians were amazing. In my mind, the service grew so rapidly in attendance primarily because there was no other worship experience like it for young Christians.”³⁴ Kimball provided the majority of the preaching, commonly speaking on issues related to evangelism and Christian apologetics. He describes his preaching style as primarily thematic. The weekly small groups most often studied through books of the Bible. Thematic preaching in the worship gathering and studying through books of the Bible in small groups, according to Kimball, provided a healthy balance in developing mature believers who know the Bible and can effectively apply it for daily living.

Early in Kimball’s ministry, he demonstrated zeal to reach individuals the church historically struggled to encounter with the gospel.³⁵ Kimball regularly challenged the students to live evangelistically, and he trained them to engage their post-Christian friends in spiritual conversations. In *The Emerging Church*, he provides a comment that encapsulates this teaching emphasis, “Like missionaries respectfully entering a foreign culture, we need to approach our post-Christian culture with a gentle awareness of the prevailing worldview while boldly expressing the great news of Jesus and God’s truth.”³⁶

³⁴Brad Wheeler, one of Kimball’s first youth at SCBC, says Kimball played a significant role in his salvation experience. Wheeler currently serves on staff at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Brad Wheeler, telephone interview by author, 30 March 2011.

³⁵Chip Ingram, Robert Patterson, Paul Sampson, and Brad Wheeler, all who were present during Kimball’s early ministry years at SCBC, provided in telephone interviews similar testimony to Kimball’s passion for evangelism, particularly evangelism directed to those generally considered unresponsive to the church.

³⁶Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 76.

Kimball spent considerable time ministering to individuals in one-on-one and small group settings. Kimball is a gifted public speaker; however, his gift is most accentuated in intimate settings. According to Darren Seitz, the Junior High Director at SCBC from 1996-2000, Kimball was a terrific conversationalist who possessed an extraordinary capacity to develop close relationships with Christians and non-Christians alike.³⁷

Robert Patterson, a student in Kimball's ministry from 1992 to 1998, states "Having now been a pastor and looking back on Dan's ministry, I am thoroughly impressed with the considerable amount of time he spent with people, particularly new believers and those on the fringe of the church."³⁸ Kimball's commitment to personal evangelism left a lasting impression on Patterson. He states, "No one has shaped my understanding of missional living more than Dan." Emphasizing evangelism and developing relationships with youth were marks of Kimball's early ministry.

Kimball also placed a heightened emphasis on sexual purity in his teaching and discipleship. Both Seitz and Wheeler provided accounts that portrayed Kimball as a person who not only possessed integrity in this area but also expected it from others. Wheeler states, "Kimball had an odd fundamentalist streak in him when it came to issues related to sexual purity. I remember traveling to Mexico on a mission trip and Dan embarrassed me in front of several friends when he rebuked me for reading a book that contained inappropriate sexual material."³⁹ Kimball's willingness to address sexual purity

³⁷Darren Seitz currently serves as the Pastor of Connections at SCBC. Darren Seitz, telephone interview by author, 14 March 2011.

³⁸Robert Patterson currently serves as the Worship Pastor at Faith Community Church in Santa Cruz. Robert Patterson, telephone interview by author, 9 March 2011.

³⁹Wheeler, interview, 30 March 2011.

was all the more important considering the diverse views on sexuality within the Santa Cruz community.

The year 1990 was significant in Kimball's life. Most notably, he married his wife of now twenty-one years, Becky. The two are blessed with nine-year-old twin daughters, Katie and Claire. That same year, warranted by the ministry's growth, the church asked Kimball to join the staff on a full-time basis. Kimball used the additional hours to continue modifying the ministry. "As the ministry began to develop," Kimball writes, "we moved to what would become known as a 'Willow Creek' model of ministry where we provided services geared toward believers on Sundays and mid-week services suited for non-believers."⁴⁰ This model was numerically effective and by the mid-1990s, over three hundred youth were attending weekly worship gatherings.

The church as a whole was also experiencing steady growth. Chip Ingram, most well-known for the radio program *Living on the Edge*, became the Senior Pastor in 1990. During Ingram's tenure from 1990 to 2003, SCBC grew from one thousand to thirty-five hundred.⁴¹ The church's overall numerical growth certainly benefited the growth of the youth ministry; notwithstanding, two of Kimball's colleagues provided

⁴⁰The concept of mid-week services was popularized by Willow Creek in the mid-1990s when they began a seeker-driven service called Axis. Axis, founded by Nancy Ortberg, was geared to reach 18 to 20-somethings, a demographic Willow Creek and most other churches were struggling to reach. Axis was not intended to be a separate entity from the rest of the church but a pipeline into the whole church. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 129-30. See Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 25. Kimball's worship approach to mid-week services during the early-to-mid-1990s is best categorized as seeker-driven. The approach, however, grew increasingly disagreeable to Kimball. In *The Emerging Church*, he acknowledges the imprudence of gearing worship gatherings primarily for the unbeliever. He calls for a "post-seeker-sensitive" approach which tailors the worship gathering for the believer while remaining sensitive to the unbeliever by providing "clear instruction and regular explanation" in order to "help seekers understand theological terms and spiritual exercises." *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴¹"Biography of Chip Ingram," *Free-Cross.Org* [on-line]; accessed 11 March 2011; available from http://free-cross.org/chip_ingram.aspx; Internet.

similar testimony in attributing most of the ministry's growth directly to Kimball's innovative and dynamic leadership.⁴²

Ingram and Kimball developed a close relationship. The two regularly met at a local pizzeria to discuss all aspects of church life. Reflecting on Kimball's character, Ingram referred to Kimball as the most teachable and humble person he had ever worked with in ministry.⁴³ He recalls being thoroughly impressed with Kimball's ability to understand people: "Dan is a cultural designer. He could study any group of people, whether young or old, and create a ministry and worship service in which they could come to faith, grow in their faith, and lead others to faith."⁴⁴

Ingram acknowledged possessing concern that Kimball's evangelistic fervor may inadvertently lead him to over-contextualizing his ministry. Nevertheless, Ingram says he allowed Kimball an extra measure of ministerial freedom because he trusted that Kimball was committed to reaching their post-Christian culture with historical Christian orthodoxy.⁴⁵

Summarizing Kimball's early ministry experience at SCBC, one would say that by human measurements, it was successful. Kimball inherited a struggling youth ministry and turned it into a vibrant ministry that young people genuinely enjoyed. More important than providing enjoyment, the ministry challenged young people to grow spiritually and missionally.

⁴²Sampson, interview, 13 March 2011. Seitz, interview, 14 March 2011.

⁴³Chip Ingram, telephone interview by author, 26 March 2011.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Graceland Young Adult Ministry at SCBC

By the mid-1990s, Kimball recognized a significant problem developing in the youth ministry. An increasing number of youth were becoming disconnected from the rest of the church despite the fact SCBC was a vibrant contemporary church. Kimball and the youth leadership made considerable effort to assimilate them into the rest of the church but to no avail. The disconnect between students and adults was significant, and it could not be explained simply by generational differences. In Kimball's estimation, the youth in his ministry appeared to be experiencing some type of shift in their worldview.⁴⁶ In retrospect, he understands he was witnessing the beginnings of an epistemological shift from modernism to postmodernism.

Kimball began investigating the changes he was witnessing.⁴⁷ He formed focus groups of Christian and non-Christian teens, asking questions and studying their responses. He had the groups visit other contemporary church services in the area and inquired as to their impressions of the services. He contacted many of the nation's largest churches and discovered some emerging patterns. From coast to coast, younger generations were no longer responding to evangelistic strategies that had previously been successful. Younger generations were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with contemporary church services and the seeker-sensitive approach.⁴⁸ Youth, college, and

⁴⁶Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 259.

⁴⁷Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 278.

⁴⁸The term "seeker-sensitive" is applied broadly to those churches adopting any form of the seeker-sensitive approach. Kimball does not use "seeker-driven" terminology. Consequently, he does not delineate between the terms "seeker-sensitive" and "seeker-driven." Thus, he sometimes uses the term "seeker-sensitive" when "seeker-driven" would more accurately apply.

young adult ministries were largely in a state of confusion and transition.⁴⁹ The research revealed significant change in how young people perceived and related to the church.

Santa Cruz youth, Christian and non-Christian alike, were being indoctrinated by a culture that was distinctly post-Christian. Their culture's values, morals, and convictions ceased to be rooted in a Judeo-Christian worldview. Culture was under the influence of postmodernism, and no longer could one assume an individual's presuppositions were similar to previous generations.⁵⁰ Kimball explains,

In the past, when younger people left the church, we knew they would come back when they had kids because their "roots" were there. But today those growing up outside of the church don't have any Christian roots to return to. Merely dealing with generational style issues is not going to work this time around. There is a big difference between worldview change and generational change, and we know face both combined.⁵¹

Postmodernism's impact was gradual, for the shift from modernism to postmodernism was not instantaneous. Kimball was not encountering the most severe forms of postmodernism, most notably nihilism.⁵² Common changes Kimball witnessed regarding young people's faith at SCBC included a greater desire for the following:⁵³

⁴⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 34.

⁵⁰A misconception regarding postmodernism, according to Chip Ingram, is that its impact upon culture is relegated exclusively to youth and young adults. Ingram testified that postmodern philosophy, while most widely accepted by younger generations, was clearly having an impact on the middle-aged demographic in their community. This fact was evidenced by significant number of middle-aged adults attending SCBC's Young Adult Ministry, Graceland. Ingram, interview, 26 March 2012.

⁵¹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 46. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck claim that some emerging church leaders, including Kimball, have exaggerated the differences between modernism and postmodernism, and postmodernism's impact upon Christian ministry. As DeYoung and Kluck point out, whether an individual has been influenced by modernism or postmodernism, human needs remain the same. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 151-53.

⁵²Nihilism is the belief that there is no universal truth or underlying reality that undergirds moral values. For a historical examination of postmodernism and its various forms, see Heath White's *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

⁵³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 105, 175, 201, 215, 229.

1. Cultivating one's faith in community
2. Developing a faith with an element of mystery
3. Understanding the historicity of the Christian faith
4. Increased interest in compassion ministries
5. Embracing of the arts in worship

With these shifts in mind, in the fall of 1996, Kimball requested a move from the youth ministry in order to begin Graceland, a worship service for young adults.

Graceland, a name chosen because of its spiritual connotations and Kimball's fondness for Elvis Presley, was launched in 1997. Graceland replaced the existing college ministry "which was basically a miniature version of the main services."⁵⁴ Graceland was admittedly an experiment and one of the first services of its kind.⁵⁵ It differed significantly from any worship service Kimball had previously coordinated.⁵⁶ Describing some of the changes made with Graceland, Kimball writes,

⁵⁴Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: EmergentYS, 2004), 169.

⁵⁵In the mid-1980s, church leaders began recognizing that youth, commonly referred to as Generation X, were leaving the church at an increasing rate. Hoping to bridge the gap, a handful of churches began adapting methodologies in order to reengage young people. Most changes were methodological in nature and involved only surface changes. For example, these "Gen-X" churches, as they become known, would modify worship styles and intersperse Gen-X culture into the overall approach to church. Dieter Zander and Tim Celek were synonymous with Gen-X ministry primarily because of their writings and the Gen-X ministries in which they were involved. A second version of Gen-X churches, the "church-within-the church," developed in the 1990s. This version arose primarily in mega-churches desiring to create a ministry that would attract young adults. Birthing a "church-within-a-church" was predictably problematic and the experiment was largely abandoned by the early 2000s. Graceland was one of the most well-known "church-within-a-church" ministries. This information was provided through an interview with Dave Travis, the Managing Director of Leadership Network. Travis has been on Leadership Network's staff since 1995. David Travis, email to author, 13 March 2011.

⁵⁶Describing the changes Kimball implemented with Graceland, Seitz states, "Kimball's worship philosophy experienced significant reform in the late 1990s. For instance, the music, led by Josh Fox, was distinctly more theological and God-centered as they moved to singing rearranged hymns. Also, Kimball began leveraging the arts to connect with a particular demographic and he spoke a great deal more about Christian history and how we were part of an ancient faith. He also introduced a lot of crosses and Christian symbols into the services." Seitz, interview, 14 March 2011.

We changed the space and made it more like a coffeehouse/art gallery environment. We moved the podium from up on stage to down among the people. We experimented with worship using art. We brought in some liturgical elements and other worship practices from throughout church history, not because they were cool but because as a community we found we resonated with them as ways to worship God. We made a lot of methodology changes. But it really was more than methodology – it was in retrospect a heart change and values change. We became more community based in decision making. We became more excited about being Jesus to those in our community who normally would not be in a church. We started home groups that met midweek that older people from the main church led and through which they mentored the younger. This slowly evolved to where we realized this was not just an age thing. It reached beyond the age parameters of eighteen to twenty-nine. That is when it became a church-within-a-church (although we didn't publicly call it that). The many people who were involved, the way we used the arts in worship, the way we approached leadership, and of course God were behind the rapid and large growth we experienced over the next several years.⁵⁷

By 1999, two years after its launch, Graceland attendance averaged between 800-1000. The service was drawing people from several different cities surrounding Santa Cruz. Graceland's success would eventually gain national recognition and propel Kimball into developing a speaking ministry.

Graceland generated excitement and growth; however, with its success came challenges. Graceland was beginning to feel like its own church, especially as its attendance began to parallel that of the church-wide services. Questions the staff never anticipated began to arise. Questions include the following:

How does our church fit within the whole church? How are the elders of the main church involved in this? How is the senior pastor involved? What happens now, as people can stay here and grow older together and not have to become a part of the other church services of the main church?⁵⁸

Tension between Ingram and Kimball was also building. Sampson described the scenario as having two captains, Ingram and Kimball, steering the ship and the captains possessing distinctively different visions and approaches to ministry. "Chip and Dan were like two

⁵⁷Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 278-79.

⁵⁸Ibid., 279.

strong forces pushing in very different directions,” said Sampson, “Both men were great leaders. Both men were godly. They simply viewed ministry differently.”⁵⁹

Kimball also garnered criticism as he guided Graceland into uncharted waters. Kimball’s proposal to read the Apostle’s Creed in a worship gathering was received with apprehension by some staff members who viewed the practice as “too liturgical.”⁶⁰ Seitz recalls a specific time when Kimball was rebuked for allowing individuals of other faiths to share about their religions during a service. Kimball viewed it as a way to educate Christians on opposing worldviews, but others felt the worship service was an inappropriate venue for such an exercise.⁶¹

Eventually, Kimball had to integrate Graceland into the values and systems of SCBC.⁶² Under Ingram’s direction, the preaching in all the services was brought into alignment.⁶³ In addition, Graceland’s worship leaders would lead in the main services, and vice versa. The attempt at integration was unsuccessful, leaving Kimball discouraged.

The more we aligned the values and infrastructure and style of leadership of Graceland and Santa Cruz Bible Church, however, the more we distanced ourselves from the very things that made Graceland unique. Instead of our discussions being exciting ones about mission and innovation they turned into discussions about squeezing Graceland into how the rest of the church functioned. Graceland suddenly felt wrong. We saw fewer and fewer of whom I consider post-Christian people coming and more and more already-Christians with a modern mindset. In many ways it wasn’t Graceland anymore. We recognized that moving Graceland into alignment with the rest of the church wasn’t quite working like we thought it would. There were clashes in small-group values, in membership values.

⁵⁹Sampson, interview, 13 March 2011.

⁶⁰Seitz, interview, 14 March 2011.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 279.

⁶³Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 172.

What we lost most at Graceland was the distinct leadership community Recognizing where we had gone astray, we decided to go back to our original vision – but began talking about birthing a new church instead of simply trying to “fix” what we broke.⁶⁴

In 2003, Kimball wrote his first book *The Emerging Church*, a book he admits is a fleshing out into written form his frustrations during this difficult stretch of ministry.⁶⁵

Simultaneously to the Graceland experience, Kimball was continuing his theological education at Western Seminary’s extension center in San Jose. Western Seminary describes itself as a “theologically conservative, trans-denominational graduate school.”⁶⁶ He graduated with a Masters of Arts in 2000 and currently serves as an adjunct professor of Pastoral Ministry at Western Seminary’s Sacramento extension center.

Vintage Faith Church (2004 – Present)

By 2003, a discouraged Kimball recognized that Graceland, as he desired it to be, would not thrive if required to adhere to the values and ministry philosophy of SCBC. Working closely with SCBC leadership, Kimball began to explore the possibility of planting a church out of SCBC. Those ideas came to fruition near the end of 2003 when SCBC approved the launch of Vintage Faith Church with Kimball as the Lead Pastor and Josh Fox as Worship Pastor.⁶⁷ As the mother church, SCBC paid one-quarter of Kimball’s salary for the first year after the launch as well as providing office space and

⁶⁴Ibid., 173.

⁶⁵Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 179.

⁶⁶“Request Info,” *Western Seminary* [on-line]; accessed 12 March 2011; available from <http://www.westernseminary.edu/inforequest.html>; Internet.

⁶⁷An explanation for the naming of the church is provided on the VFC website: “We chose the name ‘Vintage Faith Church’ as we wanted to reflect the ‘vintage’ values of the early church and teachings of Jesus. We know that our culture today is far different from the culture of the New Testament, but instead of being shaped by contemporary organized religion, we desired to focus on the original understanding of what the ‘vintage’ early church was about.” “The History of Vintage Faith Church,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 12 February 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/history>; Internet.

facilities on SCBC's campus at a reduced rental rate for two years.⁶⁸ Graceland ended in December 2003, and VFC was launched with a core group of 175 in February 2004. During this three-month period, the newly appointed VFC leadership organized, prayed, and provided training for those committed to joining the plant. VFC launched offering a Sunday night worship service and a mid-week community group ministry.

VFC's launch was prompted in large part to the differing values and ministry philosophy between SCBC and Graceland; hence, VFC's leadership felt it was imperative to communicate clearly their vision and ministry philosophy. VFC adopted the vision statement, "To see God transform us into a worshiping community of missional theologians."⁶⁹ This vision statement was further articulated through seven original value statements, as follows:⁷⁰

1. We desire to do things that happen and can be explained only by the Holy Spirit's involvement, not by our use of innovative ministry methodology.
2. We desire to be a church that is a mission not a church that has a missions "department."
3. We will be an equipping church. The Vintage Faith Church staff empowers people of the church to fulfill their God-given dreams and ministries.
4. We will ruthlessly ensure that it is clearly known that "the church is the people" and that "you can't go to church."
5. We will be extremely passionate about developing a church culture that promotes and provides deep theological training.
6. We will build this church as a family church, breaking down the departmental separation of families within the church structure as much as possible.

⁶⁸Kimball, email, 12 April 2011.

⁶⁹An in-depth explanation of VFC's vision statement can be found on the church's website. "The Vision of Vintage Faith Church," *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 12 February 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision>; Internet.

⁷⁰This list is quoted from Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 176-78.

7. We will use the creative arts to an extreme in all we do, combining the ancient with the future worship and on a mission.

These seven value statements have shaped and continue to shape the ministry at VFC.

Ministering to individuals influenced by post-Christian culture was central to VFC's values; for that reason, church leadership realized it needed to move its ministry downtown into the cultural hub of Santa Cruz. The lack of an evangelical presence in that area of Santa Cruz was also a motivating factor for relocation. Fox writes, "The largest evangelical work near the University of California Santa Cruz and downtown was seventy people, so that was part of our motivation in wanting to relocate. We wanted to be closer to the university and downtown so we looked for a Westside location."⁷¹ VFC was able to make that transition in early 2006 when they entered into an agreement with the First Presbyterian Church of Santa Cruz. The First Presbyterian Church was a small congregation of primarily senior adults who gathered in a building located on one of the busiest intersections in downtown Santa Cruz.

The agreement between the two churches allowed VFC to rent office space and to move their evening worship service off the SCBC campus. Two years after VFC's transition into the new facility, on January 1, 2008, a declining First Presbyterian Church would agreed to be absorbed into VFC. The two churches became one, forming an unlikely partnership between distinctly different congregations. The new facility, built in the 1930s, was considerably smaller, but it possessed a dated character that mirrored the values of the congregation. The worship center, with a maximum seating of three

⁷¹"Eric Bryant's Interview of Josh Fox," *Origins* (July 2010) [on-line]; accessed 17 March 2011; available from <http://www.ericbryant.org/audio/NotLikeMe-Fox.mp3>; Internet.

hundred, provided an intimate setting. The room size fit into Kimball's long-term plans to launch smaller gatherings rather than growing one or two gatherings increasingly larger.⁷²

VFC experienced significant growth during the period of transition to downtown Santa Cruz. Months after relocating, the church launched a second service on Easter 2006. Eventually, the church launched a third service. Historically, VFC has not kept statistical data; however, they began tracking worship and small group attendance in November 2010. VFC currently averages 875 attendees in their three Sunday services.⁷³

A Leader in the Emerging Church Movement

Kimball's ministry success during the 1990s at SCBC did not go unnoticed. By the mid-1990s, he was beginning to speak at regional conferences and churches. Most commonly he spoke on the topic of doing ministry in a Gen-X culture, which was a growing interest among evangelicals.

Leadership Network

In 1997, the same year Graceland was launched, SCBC leadership attended the L.E.A.D. (Leadership Evaluation and Development) conference at Dallas Theological Seminary.⁷⁴ Representatives from Leadership Network were also present. Their purpose in attending was to identify leaders who were utilizing innovative methods for reaching

⁷²"Vintage Faith is Moving," *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (September 2005) [on-line], accessed 17 March 2011, available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2005/09/index.html; Internet.

⁷³Dan Kimball, email to author, 29 August 2011. Exploration of VFC's doctrinal teachings and ministries will occur in subsequent chapters.

⁷⁴SCBC leadership had several ties to Dallas Theological Seminary. Most notably, Lead Pastor Chip Ingram received a Masters of Theology from that institution in 1984. Attending the conference was an attempt to form a unified leadership approach among SCBC's pastoral staff.

younger generations.⁷⁵ Leadership Network was also exploring the new “church-within-a-church” phenomenon; therefore, when hearing of Graceland, Leadership Network was interested in speaking with Kimball.⁷⁶ Through conversations at L.E.A.D., Leadership Network asked Kimball if he would be willing to speak at their events. Kimball agreed. This partnership marked the beginning of Kimball’s national speaking ministry.

“Gen-X” ministry was gaining popularity by the mid-1990s, primarily through the writings of Dieter Zander, Tim Celek, Kevin Ford, and George Barna.⁷⁷ Its growing popularity prompted Leadership Network to host a number of events focused on Gen-X ministry. In 1996, Leadership Network hosted Gen-X 1.0 in Mt. Hermon, CA. The following year, at Gen-X 2.0, Kimball spoke on developing a young adult worship service. Over the next two years, Kimball spoke at several Leadership Network-sponsored conferences and forums. Through these gatherings, Kimball began networking with other young leaders including Andrew Jones, Chris Seay, and Mark Driscoll.

“Emerging” Language

Paralleling the launch of Kimball’s speaking ministry was a major shift in language among young generational leaders. In light of the cultural shift that appeared to

⁷⁵Established in 1984, Leadership Network is a church-assisting ministry that fosters church innovation and growth through strategies, programs, tools, and resources. Their mission “is to identify, connect, and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.” “Our Mission,” *Leadership Network* [on-line]; accessed 22 April 2007; available from http://www.leadnet.org/about_OurMission.asp; Internet.

⁷⁶During the 1990s, Leadership Network studied churches using the “church-within-a-church” model. The vast majority of examples were deemed unsuccessful because they fostered division. By the late 1990s, Leadership Network advised clients not to implement the “church-within-a-church” model but to church plant instead. Dave Travis, email, 13 March 2011.

⁷⁷Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Kevin G. Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in Language for Generations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995). George Barna, *Baby Boomers: The Disillusioned Generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994).

be occurring, “Gen-X” language began to be replaced with alternative terms such as “postmodern” and “emerging.” This changeover in terminology occurred gradually from 1997 to 2001.⁷⁸ According to Kimball, postmodern language was short-lived for two reasons. First, the term quickly became misunderstood. Postmodernism was improperly equated with a style of worship rather than a philosophical response to modernism. Second, the complexities of postmodern philosophy were difficult to understand, let alone communicate. “Postmodern” language eventually gave way to “emerging” language.

Kimball’s social network commonly used the term “emerging” by 2001.⁷⁹

Addressing the change in vernacular, Kimball writes,

The word “emerging church” seemed safer and more non-age specific and began being used more and more, not only for churches and ministries focused on younger generations, but for churches focusing on the fact that culture was really changing and shifting. So the term moved past a generational focus to more of a cultural focus.⁸⁰

“Emerging” language was becoming increasingly common among those in particular social networks; however, knowledge and use of the language would not become widespread among mainstream evangelicals until the mid-2000s.

⁷⁸Leadership Network’s promotional tagline in 1997 was “Advanced Scouts for the Emerging Church.” This is the first time Kimball recalls hearing the term “emerging” in relationship to Christianity and the church. Dan Kimball, “Origins of the Terms ‘Emerging’ and ‘Emergent’ Church: Part Two,” *Vintage Faith* (21 April 2006) [on-line]; accessed 25 February 2007; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/origins_of_the_t.html: Internet.

⁷⁹“Emerging” language, as it is currently understood, first appeared in 1970. Writing a book appropriately titled *The Emerging Church*, Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne prophetically spoke of a church constantly transforming in light of a chaotic culture. Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne, *The Emerging Church* (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1970). Larson and Osborne’s “emerging” terminology lay dormant for a number of years, but resurfaced in the mid-1990s when Leadership Network used the term “emerging” in their ministry tagline.

⁸⁰Kimball, “Origins of the Terms ‘Emerging’ and ‘Emergent’ Church.”

Youth Specialties

Kimball's ministry garnered immediate notoriety through his speaking at Leadership Network events. Youth Specialties, a leading youth ministry organization, invited Kimball to speak at events and forums on ministry to younger generations. His first Youth Specialties' event came in the spring of 1998. He sat on a forum with other youth ministry experts who were experimenting with the "church-within-a-church" ministry model. Mark Ostreicher, a Vice President at Youth Specialties, first met Kimball at this event.⁸¹ Ostreicher remembers being impressed with Kimball's performance on the panel, leading him to invite Kimball to speak at other events.

Kimball regularly spoke on the topic of postmodern youth ministry. At the 2001 National Pastor's Convention, an event hosted by Youth Specialties, Kimball gave a lecture on the emerging church. The lecture generated considerable interest, including that of Christian publisher Zondervan. Zondervan requested that Kimball put his lecture into book form, which he did, culminating in Kimball's first book *The Emerging Church*. *The Emerging Church*, published in 2003, was the first contemporary book to use the word "emerging" in its title.⁸² Thirteen years later, Kimball continues to speak at Youth Specialties events.

Birth of the Emerging Church Movement in North America

In 1997, as Kimball's speaking ministry gained momentum, Leadership Network set in motion a new initiative to gather together the next generation of evangelical leaders. Leadership Network commissioned Doug Pagitt, a Youth Pastor

⁸¹Ostreicher became President of Youth Specialties in 2002 and held that position until 2009.

⁸²Kimball, "Origins of the Terms 'Emerging' and 'Emergent' Church: Part One."

from Wooddale Church in Minneapolis, with assembling this group with the purpose of networking and discussing innovative methods for reaching younger generations.

One of the first gatherings Pagitt hosted took place at the Glen Eyrie Mansion in Colorado Springs in 1998. This small gathering is historically significant because many of the future leaders of the ECM were present. Individuals at this meeting included Ken Baugh, Spencer Burke, Tim Celek, Brad Cecil, Tim Conder, Mark Driscoll, Ron Johnson, Andrew Jones, Dan Kimball, Sally Morgenthaller, Mark Ostreicher, Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Chuck Smith, Jr., and Deiter Zander.⁸³

The gathering's conversation began as a discussion about attracting Gen-Xers back to the church, in much the same way Rick Warren and Bill Hybels had led the Baby Boomer generation to reengage.⁸⁴ However, the discussion shifted when Brad Cecil presented his conviction that more than a simple generational difference was occurring among Gen-Xers. Cecil was convinced the church was experiencing the effects of an entire worldview shift from modernism to postmodernism.⁸⁵ He questioned the effectiveness of the Evangelical movement and demanded an evaluation of its theology and methods. Postmodernism was a relatively new and nebulous concept for many of the leaders present, leading most of the group to reject Cecil's presentation.⁸⁶ Cecil recalls

⁸³This list was constructed with information from Brad Cecil and Andrew Jones. Brad Cecil, email to author, 9 June 2008. Andrew Jones, email to author, 9 May 2008.

⁸⁴Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 42.

⁸⁵Brad Cecil later turned his talk into a PowerPoint presentation that has attained legendary status among those in the emergent stream of the ECM. A copy of Cecil's presentation is located on the Emergent Village website. Steve McKnight, "Brad Cecil's PowerPoint Featured in 'The New Christians.'" *Emergent Village* (10 April 2008) [on-line]; accessed 5 May 2008; available from <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/brad-cecils-powerpoint-featured-in-the-new-christians>; Internet.

⁸⁶Jones, *The New Christians*, 43.

Zander and Kimball expressing their concern regarding a Christianity shaped by postmodern theology.⁸⁷ Others, such as Pagitt, Driscoll, and Seay, believed Cecil's presentation possessed credence, necessitating further exploration.

Emerging from this gathering was the Young Leaders Network. The original members included Pagitt, Driscoll, Seay, and Cecil. YLN, commissioned by Leadership Network, organized conferences around the United States with the purpose of "moving the conversation away from doing ministry that was hopelessly modern and disjointed toward promoting a new type of ministry suited for individuals indoctrinated by a radically different worldview – that of postmodernity."⁸⁸

The YLN did not initially hold a strong theological agenda, for its primary interest resided in articulating epistemological changes and promoting best practices for postmodern ministry. As the YLN gained momentum and its objectives made clear, others joined YLN including Kimball, Conder, Andrew Jones, Spencer Burke, Brian McLaren, and Tony Jones.⁸⁹ From 1998 to 2001, according to McLaren, "emerging" language was used as everyday vernacular at YLN gatherings.⁹⁰

YLN became increasingly theological, primarily through the influence of McLaren. This led Leadership Network to form a theological work group as part of YLN.

⁸⁷Cecil, email, 9 June 2008.

⁸⁸Andrew Jones, "Epic-Center Tribal Generation," *TheOoze.com* (13 February 2001); accessed 2 June 2008; available from <http://www.theooze.com/articles/article.cfm?id=219>; Internet.

⁸⁹Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 209.

⁹⁰According to Brian McLaren, expressions such as "emerging leaders" and "emerging generations" were commonly used at YLN gatherings. The expression "emerging church" was not as prominent because the YLN desired to avoid creating another brand or model of church; rather, the term "emerging" was understood to be a dynamic that would manifest itself in diverse ways across all sectors of the church. Brian McLaren, email to author, 6 June 2008.

The core group members included Tony Jones, McLaren, Pagitt, Seay, and Driscoll, although Driscoll would eventually step down for numerous reasons including differences in theological convictions.⁹¹ Kimball was not a part of this group, choosing to participate only in those events focused on methodological aspects of church ministry.⁹²

Eighteen months after the formation of YLN, tension grew over the group's increasingly theological nature.⁹³ Leadership Network, an atheological ministry by design, desired to gather leaders across the theological spectrum and discover best practices, not promote a particular theology. In light of the tension, Pagitt stepped down and returned to Minneapolis to plant Solomon's Porch.

Jason Mitchell, a church planter from the West Coast, was hired in 1999 to fill the vacancy. Under Mitchell's leadership, the theological work group was renamed the Terra Nova Theological Project.⁹⁴ By 2001, Leadership Network's tolerance for the group's theological nature expired, and Leadership Network discontinued its financial support. Leadership Network's founder Bob Buford later publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the direction of YLN, and to this day the organization has intentionally avoided any association with the ECM.⁹⁵ The group was determined to

⁹¹Driscoll, *Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions*, 209-10.

⁹²Kimball, email, 12 April 2011.

⁹³Tony Jones claims the YLN's growing theological bent was spurred on by the inclusion of McLaren. McLaren maintained that effective ministry in emerging culture would necessitate adopting a postmodern-influenced theology. Tony Jones, interview by author at The Original Pancake House in Edina, MN, 19 May 2008. The tension between Leadership Network and the YLN is discussed in Tony Jones' *The New Christians*, 47-49.

⁹⁴Contrary to numerous sources, Kimball was never a part of the Terra Nova Theological Project. Both Ken Silva of *Appraising Ministries* and Jim Belcher's book *Deep Church* were inaccurate in their claim that Kimball was associated with it. Ken Silva, telephone interview by author, 29 March 2011.

⁹⁵Jones, *The New Christians*, 48.

continue equipping emerging leaders and launched its own initiative under the name Emergent Village, or Emergent.⁹⁶ The formation of Emergent Village on June 21, 2001 marked the first time the word “emerging” or “emergent” was used to identify an organization or a specific network of individuals.⁹⁷

Emergent/YS-Zondervan Publishing Board

The “emerging church” conversation was amassing significant interest by 2001; consequently, Youth Specialties examined the potential for serving the emerging church conversation through publishing and conferences. Ostreicher led the charge – arranging meetings between Youth Specialties and Emergent Village’s Tony Jones, Pagitt, and McLaren. Kimball, acting as a representative of Youth Specialties, was also invited. This meeting forged a partnership called Emergent/YS that launched the “emerging church” conversation into broader evangelicalism.

Five Emergent/YS Conventions were held in Dallas, San Diego, and Nashville from 2003 to 2005. Due to the release of Kimball’s second book *Emerging Worship*, he primarily spoke on the topic of developing multisensory worship gatherings for emerging generations. Emergent/YS entered into a publishing partnership with Zondervan in

⁹⁶The term “emergent” rose to the fore as a metaphor for new growth on the forest floor “emerging” beneath the old growth. This metaphor, first articulated in Larson and Osborne’s *The Emerging Church*, is still commonly used today to explain the movement.

⁹⁷Emergent Village, whose founding members include Pagitt, Andrew Jones, Tony Jones, Tim Keel, and Brian McLaren, describes itself as “a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Emergent Village is commonly associated with the more theologically progressive within the ECM. It possesses a statement of values and practices but not a statement of faith. “About Emergent Village,” *Emergent Village* [on-line], accessed 13 February 2008, available from <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about>; Internet. Ed Stetzer reported that Kimball was an early member of Emergent Village, but Kimball maintains he was not. Ed Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion on the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009), 59.

January 2003. Under the terms of the Emergent/YS-Zondervan partnership, eight to twelve books would be published annually.⁹⁸ The Emergent/YS-Zondervan publishing board consisted of Tony Jones, Kimball, McLaren, Ostreicher, and Pagitt. This board was responsible for establishing agenda and reviewing manuscripts.

According to Ostreicher, Kimball was a voice of opposition on the board.

Dan was the theologically conservative representative on the board. He also had more confidence in the traditional church. Where some of the others spoke of creating a new church to reach younger generations, Dan believed they could be reached through a reformed traditional church. He brought a good balance to the board and the tension he created kept us off the dangerous fringes.⁹⁹

The relationship between Emergent/YS and Zondervan was brief. Zondervan broke ties with Emergent/YS, ending the partnership after three years.¹⁰⁰

Growing Criticism of the Emerging Church Movement

The ECM's theological boundaries began without distinct shape, as is common among adolescent movements. Evangelical observers did not permit its nebulous boundaries for long. Criticism aimed at the movement surfaced as early as 1999; however, the criticism was significantly intensified and expansive by 2005.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸“Zondervan and Youth Specialties Announce New Publishing Partnership Aimed at the Emerging Church,” *Youth Specialties* (8 January 2003) [on-line]; accessed 20 April 2007; available from <http://www.youthspecialties.com/about/news/2003/emergentYS.php>; Internet.

⁹⁹Ostreicher, telephone interview by author, 22 March 2011.

¹⁰⁰The Emergent/YS-Zondervan partnership dissolved over theological differences between Zondervan and some emerging church leaders. The relationship ended shortly after the release of McLaren's *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Jones, *The New Christians*. 51.

¹⁰¹On the blog *Tall Skinny Kiwi*, Andrew Jones provides a historical review of criticisms leveled against the Emerging Church. Andrew Jones, “Emerging Church Critics (Updated),” *Tall Skinny Kiwi* (17 November 2005) [on-line]; accessed 10 March 2010; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/11/the_fundie_blog.html#more; Internet.

By this point, the blogosphere hosted numerous critics, but the most noteworthy critic was D. A. Carson's *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*.¹⁰² Carson's book generated much discussion among evangelicals and emerging church leaders alike, and it solicited a lengthy response from seven emerging church leaders, including Kimball.¹⁰³ John MacArthur condemned the movement unilaterally. He also spoke out against Zondervan and *Christianity Today*, accusing them of embracing postmodernism and aiding and abetting an unbiblical movement.¹⁰⁴ Because many of the early critics of the ECM spoke in generalities, there existed a growing misconception that emerging church leaders shared a common theology – a theology capitulated to postmodern culture's demands. These early, and sometimes inaccurate, portrayals filtered down throughout the writings of evangelicals.

Several articles helped to define and categorize the movement. The most notable included Stetzer's "First Person – Understanding the Emerging Church," Justin Taylor's "An Emerging Church Primer," Driscoll's "A Pastoral Perspective on the

¹⁰²Carson provided helpful critique in analyzing the ECM's strengths and vulnerabilities. It also rightfully confronts emerging church leaders McLaren and Steve Chalke on their distortions of the doctrines of propitiation and substitutionary atonement. D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 186-87. Carson was justified in his concern with the theology and theological trajectory coming from some of the movement's most prominent leaders. In retrospect, the downside to Carson's review is that it painted the movement with too broad a brush. It oversimplified a diverse collection of individuals and churches. Doug Pagitt speaks to the movement's diversity in stating, "The Emerging Church Movement is more diverse [theologically] than even Protestantism because it functions within Catholicism, Judaism, Orthodox, Mennonites, and Seven Day Adventist." Doug Pagitt, interview by author, Edina, MN, 19 May 2008.

¹⁰³Andrew Jones provides a blog post that speaks to the anticipation and dialogue surrounding Carson's "eagerly awaited book." Andrew Jones, "The Book by Dr. D.A. Carson," *Tall Skinny Kiwi* (21 April 2005) [on-line]; accessed 10 March 2011; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/04/the_book_by_dr_.html; Internet. The response to *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* was submitted by Burke, Andrew Jones, Tony Jones, Kimball, McLaren, Pagitt, and Seay. The response is in Tony Jones' *The New Christians*, 227-32.

¹⁰⁴John MacArthur, *What's So Different about the Emerging Church?* [CD-ROM], GTY107 (Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2006), chap. 14. MacArthur expands on his concerns in *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007).

Emerging Church,” and Scot McKnight’s “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.”¹⁰⁵

These articles demonstrated clear theological and methodological distinctions among those associated with the ECM. Their taxonomies provided observers a framework in which to better understand the movement’s shape.

Stetzer, credited with constructing the first taxonomy of the ECM, divided the movement into three theological/methodological streams.¹⁰⁶ Each stream possessed distinct- yet progressive methodologies; however, they varied significantly theologically. The distinctions within the ECM became increasingly more clear in 2007 when Zondervan published *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*, a book in which Kimball was a contributor. The book established a clear delineation between some of the movement’s most prominent figures. Arguably the most helpful description of the ECM was provided by Darrin Patrick, pastor of the Journey in St. Louis, MO.¹⁰⁷ Patrick gave a presentation at Covenant Theological Seminary in 2007 in which one session was dedicated to a lexicon for conversations about the ECM.

¹⁰⁵Ed Stetzer, “First Person – Understanding the Emerging Church.” *Baptist Press* (6 January 2006) [on-line]; accessed 20 February 2006; available from <http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=22406>; Internet. Justin Taylor, “An Emerging Church Primer,” *IX Marks* (September 2006) [on-line]; accessed 2 March 2007; available from http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,PTID314526%7CCCHID598014%7CCCHID2249226,00.html#_ftn8; Internet. Mark Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church,” *Criswell Theological Review* (Spring 2006): 87-94. Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key Elements of the Most Controversial and Misunderstood Movement in Church History,” *Christianity Today* (19 January 2007) [on-line]; accessed 9 February 2007; available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=40523; Internet.

¹⁰⁶Stetzer’s taxonomy organized the ECM leaders into three categories: relevants, reconstructionists, and revisionists. Stetzer placed Kimball into the “relevants” category. He describes “relevants” stating, “These people attempt to contextualize music, worship, and outreach much like the “contemporary church” movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Their methodology may be considered by critics to be progressive. However, their theology is often conservative and evangelical. Many are doctrinally sound, growing, and impacting lostness.” Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church,” *The Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* (Fall 2008): 82.

¹⁰⁷Darrin Patrick, “The History and the Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5262/>; Internet.

Life beyond the Emerging Church Movement

The controversy surrounding the ECM was taxing on Kimball. He wrestled with whether his association with some individuals within the movement was appropriate and wise. His chief purpose for entering into the “emerging conversation” was to assist churches in reaching the next generation with the gospel through best practices. However, aspirations to maintain the ECM’s focus on methodology may have been idealistic. One can argue Kimball did not always demonstrate proper discernment in his affiliation with particular individuals and groups.¹⁰⁸ In evaluating contemporary culture and methodologies, Kimball found agreement with many of the movement’s controversial leaders. Unfortunately, their theological drift to the edge of orthodoxy, and sometimes beyond, led Kimball to break from those associated with Emergent Village.¹⁰⁹

Kimball has moved away from “emerging” language in recent years due to the proverbial baggage now associated with the vernacular. As evidenced in more recent writings, “missional” language has replaced “emerging” language. Kimball began writing for *Outreach* magazine in 2007 and *Leadership* magazine in 2008. Kimball has used these platforms to promote missional Christianity grounded in conservative theology.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Ingram recalls personal conversations in which Kimball expressed confusion over whether or not he should continue to partner with those who held theological views outside Christian orthodoxy. Ingram states, “Dan is a natural bridge builder and like anyone, doesn’t want to create enemies. I think that’s why he struggled to know where to draw the lines when it came to who he would associate with.” Ingram, interview, 26 March 2011.

¹⁰⁹In 2007, Kimball contributed an essay to *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, a book that was published through a partnership with Baker Books and Emergent Village. This essay marked the last time Kimball worked on a project associated with Emergent Village.

¹¹⁰Kimball commonly writes on topics such as sin and hell, topics ECM leaders stereotypically avoided. See Dan Kimball, “Justice Needs Evangelism,” *Outreach*, September/October 2010, 24; idem, “Teaching the Truth about Hell”; idem, *Outreach*, May/June 2008, 24; idem, “‘You’re Not a Fundamentalist If...,’” *Outreach*, November/December 2010, 24-25.

Kimball considers those in the Emergent Village network to be friends; therefore, his decision to speak out against Emergent Village in a 2010 interview with *Neue* magazine was a difficult decision. In the article, Kimball referred to the theologically progressive in the movement as pushing a “classical extreme liberalism in a new, cooler wrapper.” Articulating disappointment in the movement’s direction, he states,

When the whole emerging church discussion began, it was primarily about evangelism and mission to emerging generations. That’s why I got into it, and it was fun and a thrill to be a part of. After a while, some within it began focusing more on theology and even some cores issues of theology – which is needed as theology is very important. But the whole central focus of evangelism to emerging generations was lost, in my opinion.¹¹¹

When asked about the statements made in *Neue* magazine, Kimball said,

At some point, I came to the conclusion that I had to choose faith in Christ over friendship. The ECM began as a mission’s movement and I’m disappointed that theological controversies messed the entire thing up. Its quite sad but I am hoping that the ECM will have a lasting impact for its challenging of Christians to live their lives as missionaries.¹¹²

Desiring to continue the missional aspects of the ECM, in April 2009, Kimball took a lead role in launching a new network of missionally-minded Christian leaders called Origins. The Origins’ website describes itself stating,

This network is a community of followers of Jesus who are passionate about seeing people know God and experience life as He intended. As we are guided by the Scriptures we will inspire one another to embrace innovation and creativity as a means to fulfill this mission.¹¹³

¹¹¹Adam Smith, “Emergent’s Last Rites: Is this the End of a Divisive Movement, or Simply Reformation?,” *Neue* (Spring 2010): 59.

¹¹²Kimball, email, 12 April 2011.

¹¹³“About Origins,” *Origins* [on-line]; accessed 2 March 2010; available from <http://originsproject.org/about-origins>; Internet. Many of Origins’ founders, like Kimball, were looking for a new way to advance the cause of missional Christianity outside the ECM. Founders included Erwin McManus of Mosaic, Rick McKinley of Image Dei Community, and Scot McKnight of North Park University.

Origins' leaders adopted a doctrinal statement that affirms historical Christian orthodoxy, including the infallibility of Scripture.¹¹⁴

A signifier of Kimball's expanding influence into broader evangelicalism, in 2010, he became a guest faculty member at Wheaton College.¹¹⁵ Kimball also continued his promotion of missional Christianity in April 2011 by partnering with Ed Stetzer, Tim Keller, J.D. Greear, and other evangelical leaders to create the *Missional Manifesto*. The manifesto's intent is to promote missional Christianity and to preserve and advance a gospel-centered understanding of the term "missional."¹¹⁶

Kimball graduated in the spring of 2011 with a Doctor of Ministry degree from George Fox Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Kimball serves that institution as an adjunct professor and also provides leadership for a newly established missions center for reaching younger generations.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

This chapter's stated purpose was two-fold: first, to establish Kimball as a recognized leader in the area of emerging generational ministry, and second, to establish

¹¹⁴The Origins' doctrinal statement reads, "We share a commitment to the gospel of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Scriptures as God's inspired Word, to the truths of the historical orthodox creeds (e.g., The Nicene Creed, The Apostles Creed), to the mission vision of the Lausanne Covenant and as we serve on the mission to see others understand God's dream for them as they follow Jesus." Ibid.

¹¹⁵"Faculty – Dan Kimball, D. Min.," *Wheaton College* [on-line]; accessed 5 September 2011; available from <http://www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Faculty/K/Dan-Kimball>; Internet.

¹¹⁶The framers of the *Missional Manifesto* include Ed Stetzer, Alan Hirsch, Tim Keller, Dan Kimball, Eric Mason, J.D. Greear, Craig Ott, Linda Berquist, Philip Nation, and Brad Andrews. "Missional Manifesto Framers," *Missional Manifesto* [on-line]; accessed 13 April 2011; available from <http://www.missionalmanifesto.net/info.html>; Internet.

¹¹⁷"Dan Kimball Hired to Lead New Center Focused on 'Future Faith,'" *George Fox University* [on-line]; accessed 16 August 2011; available from http://www.georgefox.edu/featured_stories/Dan_Kimball%20Hired.html; Internet.

his reputation as a man committed to godly living. Fulfillment of both criteria is vital for Kimball's endorsement as a contributing model for reaching emerging generations.

This chronological reconstructing of Kimball's life validates him on both accounts. According to John Bohannon, author of *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, Kimball is one of the four founding leaders of the ECM.¹¹⁸ Bohannon's work, aligning with this chapter's consistent testimony, validates Kimball's credentials as a well-established leader in emerging generational ministry. Also, in one accord, the testimonies of friends and colleagues affirm Kimball's commitment to godly living. This biographical examination demonstrates that Kimball is both a person of ministerial influence and godly character – two criteria essential for receiving endorsement as a contributing model for emerging generational ministry.

¹¹⁸John Bohannon considers Driscoll, Kimball, McLaren, and Pagitt as the ECM's four most significant leaders. John Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders – Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt* (USA, 2010). An online copy is available from <http://theresurgence.com/files/pdfs/6x9-Full-Online-Ebook.pdf>; Internet.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXPLORATION OF DAN KIMBALL'S THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The thesis of this dissertation is that Dan Kimball's ministry is a model for effective ministry to emerging generations. This thesis relies extensively on Kimball's ministry being rooted in historic Christian orthodoxy. It is necessary that Kimball's core doctrinal beliefs be evangelical if his ministry is to be endorsed as a recommended model. A survey of his theology is essential for this thesis to be substantiated.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one examines an evangelical theological taxonomy, or classification, of Kimball. Section two explores several of Kimball's presuppositions that shape his approach to theology. Section three examines Kimball's beliefs on several key Christian doctrines.

An Evangelical Theological Classification of Kimball

The popularization of the ECM among evangelicals occurred in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The movement garnered considerable interest among evangelicals in large part due to its ill-defined theological boundaries. Numerous evangelicals provided commentary on the movement. They developed a theological and methodological taxonomy of its leaders in an attempt to understand the shape of the movement.

Ed Stetzer's Theological Taxonomy of the Emerging Church Movement

Ed Stetzer, a Southern Baptist missiologist who is the Director of Research at LifeWay, is attributed as the first to place ECM leaders into specific theological silos. He developed a three-layered taxonomy for the purpose of helping observers distinguish the movement's theological diversity.¹ Stetzer writes,

I hoped that it [the taxonomy] would help my co-denominationalists to understand the diversity in the Emergent/Emerging Church. Unashamedly, part of my objective was to create "space" for young pastors who considered themselves emerging but still held to the denomination's theological statement.²

Apprehension over several of the movement's leaders, claims Stetzer, inhibited observers from viewing the movement objectively. Categorizing the movement was his attempt to help fellow Southern Baptists make an educated sift through the movement. Stetzer, recognizing the "limited and limiting nature of taxonomies," organized the movement's leaders into three categories: Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists.

Revelants seek to engage culture while maintaining evangelical theological convictions. Stetzer describes "Relevants," a term he admits is a neologism, stating,

These people attempt to contextualize music, worship, and outreach much like the "contemporary church" movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Their methodology may be considered by critics to be progressive. However, their theology is often

¹The widespread circulation of and dependence from other writers upon Stetzer's taxonomy speaks to its value in assessing the ECM. Andrew Jones, an early leader in the movement and a prominent emerging church blogger, commends Stetzer for his analysis. Jones, referring to Stetzer's taxonomy, entitled a blog spot, "Ed Stetzer gets it." Andrew Jones, "Ed Stetzer Gets It," *Tally Skinny Kiwi* (7 January 2006) [on-line]; accessed 10 March 2010; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/01/ed_stetzer_gets.html; Internet.

²Ed Stetzer, "The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective," *The Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* (Fall 2008): 81.

conservative and evangelical. Many are doctrinally sound, growing, and impacting lostness.³

“The common critique of Relevants,” according to Mark Driscoll, “is that they are doing little more than cool church for hip young Christians.”⁴ Stetzer categorized Kimball as a Relevant, a designation to which Kimball agrees.⁵

Reconstructionists, according to Stetzer, are primarily concerned about existing church structures. They emphasize an “incarnational” ministry model and may find a home in the “house church” movement. Unlike Relevants, Reconstructionists are dissatisfied with existing church structures. Like Relevants, they are innovative in their approaches to worship and evangelism. Individuals associated with the Reconstructionist stream include Neil Cole, Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, George Barna, and Frank Viola.

Revisionists receive most of the critique aimed at the ECM. “For this group,” states Stetzer, “both theology and methodology may be ‘re-visioned.’”⁶ Revisionists range from those on the theological fringe of orthodoxy to those advocating heresy.⁷ Revisionists most commonly bring into question teachings related to the sinfulness of human nature, the deity of Jesus, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, the

³Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church,” 82-83.

⁴Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2009), 215.

⁵Stetzer writes in the article, “I talked with Dan Kimball about this taxonomy and he agreed that he would fit the Relevant category. He quickly noted his understanding of the category was not merely an aesthetic issue – not about candles and coffee, a caricature largely pejorative and unhelpful.” Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church,” 83.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Albert Mohler offers this critique of the Revisionist stream: “When it comes to issues such as the exclusivity of the gospel, the identity of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, the authoritative character of Scripture as written revelation, and the clear teachings of Scripture concerning issues such as homosexuality, this [Revisionists stream of the] movement simply refuses to answer the question.” Albert Mohler, “A Generous Orthodoxy – Is It Orthodox?” *Crosswalk.com* (16 February 2005) [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2008; available from <http://www.crosswalk.com/root/1336217/pageo/>; Internet.

exclusivity of Jesus for salvation, and the conscious, eternal torments of hell. Individuals associated with the Revisionist stream include Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Rob Bell, Spencer Burke, and Shane Claiborne.

Stetzer's theological taxonomy created a new paradigm allowing the movement's onlookers to delineate differences between movement leaders. As evangelicals became increasingly exposed to the movement's evangelical and often theologically conservative stream, acceptance toward Relevants grew. Individuals like Mark Driscoll, Darrin Patrick, Perry Noble, Matt Chandler, Matt Carter, Erwin McManus, John Burke, and Kimball garnered credibility and increasing influence.⁸ As a result, the ministries of these men became widely respected for their passion for missional Christianity.

Uncertainty Surrounding Kimball's Theology

Stetzer's taxonomy of the ECM largely resulted in a positive impact upon Kimball's reputation among evangelicals.⁹ Prior to Stetzer's taxonomy in 2006, greater uncertainty surrounded Kimball's position on the theological spectrum. This uncertainty was driven by several legitimate concerns.

⁸Darrin Patrick, pastor of The Journey in St. Louis, MO, places these men in the "Emerging Attractional" stream, which is his equivalent term to Stetzer's Relevants. Patrick also divides the Emerging Attractional stream into two sub-streams: neo-seeker-sensitive and neo-Reformed. Patrick places Kimball in the neo-seeker-sensitive sub-stream. Darrin Patrick, "The History and the Streams of the Emerging Church," *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line]; accessed 24 November 2007; available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5262/ResultDetail.asp>; Internet.

⁹Kimball's position on the theological spectrum was still in question for some evangelicals as recent as 2009. William Henard, co-editor of *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, writes, "Dan Kimball (Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, Calif.) seems involved in a heroic attempt to keep one foot planted with both [doctrinally wary/averse and doctrinally-friendly] streams." William D. Henard, "The Emerging Church: One Movement – Two Streams," in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 8.

First, the ECM's reputation was largely negative when the movement surfaced in evangelical conversations. Driving this negativity and skepticism were the published works of many of its earliest leaders. Many of these works were written by those that Stetzer categorized as Revisionists such as Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, and Spencer Burke.¹⁰ As Revisionists produced a disproportionate number of the published works, a skewed perception of the movement developed. This distorted perception produced a propensity for evangelicals to view ECM leaders negatively until proven otherwise.¹¹ Kimball and other Relevants found themselves in this position.¹²

Second, Kimball's early writings were not overly helpful in placing him on the theological spectrum because they concentrated on methodology rather than theology.¹³ Kimball would have been well-served in expounding in more depth the biblical foundation for his methodology, particularly since he was promoting methods of ministry

¹⁰This list provides examples of some of the earlier works produced by Revisionists. Brian McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem., *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2001). Idem., *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Mike Yaconelli, ed., *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003). *Stories of Emergence* contains essays by McLaren, Jones, and Spencer Burke.

¹¹According to Darrin Patrick, most of the theologically conservative leaders in the ECM are church planters and pastors, heavily involved in church ministry. Being practitioners, they often lack the time and proclivity to publish writings, citing himself as an example. The Revisionist stream, possessing a bent toward intellectualism and philosophy, were more aggressive in promoting ideas through published works. Darrin Patrick, interview by author, Richmond Heights, MO, 3 January 2008.

¹²Robert Brewer, currently the Singles Pastor at City of Grace in Scottsdale, AZ, was an early ECM leader. In a series of emails written in 2007, Brewer addressed his frustrations with Revisionist receiving a disproportionate amount of attention. He stated, "A few leaders, most notably Brian McLaren, are attempting to hijack the terms 'emerging' and 'emergent'. It's my fear that they may ruin much of the good being accomplished through the movement." Robert Brewer, email to author, 24 January 2007.

¹³This truth is illustrated in Kimball's first two books *The Emerging Church* and *Emerging Worship*. Theological support for his innovative methodologies is present, but it is often embedded within the text and not highlighted with chapter headings or sub-headings.

that evangelicals would label unorthodox (e.g., prayer stations, worship through painting and sculpting). If one is advocating innovative methodologies, it is all the more essential to provide a well-articulated biblical apology.

Kimball acknowledges that early in his ministry, he lacked a correct understanding of the dynamic between theology and methodology. He states,

I eventually realized our methodology flows from our theology, not vice versa. I hope we will constantly be thinking through the reasons we do what we do and what theological roots support our church practice. I can no longer teach anything or use a form of media or launch a new program without thinking through the theological meaning behind it and what it communicates theologically. As a pastor, I also want to be creating a culture of theological thinking within the people of the church. I try my best to constantly be explaining the theological “why’s” behind whatever we are doing in the church.¹⁴

Surveying Kimball’s writings reveal a maturing process in that his methodological approach has progressively become more biblically-thoughtful.

Third, Kimball’s theology has been questioned because of his imprecise language and mishandling of theologically associated terms. The following statement illustrates Kimball’s lack of precision in language: “I lean toward more historic Nicene Creed orthodoxy, and I still remain overall conservative in my theology.”¹⁵ The phrase “I lean toward more historic Nicene Creed orthodoxy” demands further clarification and fosters doubt in the minds of observers.

D. A. Carson criticizes Kimball’s handling of theologically associated terms such as “deconstruct” and “redefine.” He writes,

One worries when Dan Kimball says that in the light of current biblical illiteracy we need to “deconstruct” and “redefine” biblical terms such as “Armageddon” and

¹⁴Dan Kimball, “Humble Theology: Re-exploring Doctrine While Holding on to Truth,” *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 222.

¹⁵Dan Kimball, “Response to Mark Driscoll,” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 41.

“gospel.” If all he means is that we need to explain terms in the Bible that are likely to be misunderstood by today’s biblical illiterates, then of course he is right, and all who evangelize biblical illiterates know it, whether they think of themselves as moderns or postmoderns or something else. I will happily give Kimball the benefit of the doubt, hoping that is what he means. But he should be careful when he uses words like “redefine” and “deconstruct.” To “redefine” a word is not to determine its customary meaning in given contexts by careful study; it is to give it a new meaning so as to make a passage mean something novel – a perfectly legitimate procedure in some postmodern literary exercises.... Probably Kimball uses “deconstruct” to mean “unpack” or something of that order – but no one in the field of postmodern studies uses it that way.... It appears that Kimball is completely unfamiliar with any serious discussion of postmodernism, despite his ardor for explaining what it is and what we ought to do about it. David Mills thinks this sort of criticism is unfair, since, he argues, most Christians could not define “deconstruction” accurately. True enough – but most Christians are not trying to define postmodernism or tell us how we should change because of it.¹⁶

Carson’s analysis of Kimball’s poor word choices is an example of why confusion surrounded Kimball in the earlier years of the ECM. Kimball’s theological vernacular has become more deliberate and defined over time. The reasons provoking this shift are Kimball’s further theological training, continued personal study, and mindfulness of others’ critique.

Fourth, Kimball’s affiliation with those classified as Revisionists has raised questions regarding his theology. Kimball’s most explicit connection came when he solicited Brian McLaren in 2003 to write the foreword to his first book *The Emerging Church*.¹⁷ The same year McLaren released *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, a book in which he questions the validity of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.¹⁸ Kimball

¹⁶D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 83-84. Carson is quoting from Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 175.

¹⁷The first edition of *The Emerging Church* had forewords written by Rick Warren and Brian McLaren; however, Warren recently requested his endorsement be taken off the book because he did not want to be associated with McLaren. Dan Kimball, telephone interview by author, 20 May 2010.

¹⁸Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 102.

had been warned to distance himself from McLaren by as early as 2000. McLaren spoke that year at a Leadership Network sponsored event held at SCBC. Chip Ingram, senior pastor of SCBC, recalls confronting McLaren as he walked off the platform for asserting that one's "spiritual community defines theology." Ingram, concerned for both Kimball and the reputation of SCBC, states that he warned Kimball regarding future association with McLaren.¹⁹

Kimball also opened himself up to questioning by endorsing books promoting liberal theology and theologians. Kimball, along with Eddie Gibbs, Tony Jones, McLaren, and Pagitt, provided endorsements for Ray Anderson's *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Anderson, addressing how emerging churches should rethink the relationship between the secular and the sacred, lauds the writings of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as beneficial resources to bolster one's commitment to loving the world in the name of Jesus.²⁰

Kimball also received criticism for his endorsement of Tony Jones' *Soul Shaper*.²¹ Ken Silva, President of Apprising Ministries and likely Kimball's most vocal critic, points out that Kimball recommended *Soul Shaper* in the "Helpful Books" section of *Emerging Worship*.²² *Soul Shaper* is controversial because of its promotion of Contemplative Spirituality Mysticism, also called Christian mysticism. Silva, in a phone

¹⁹Chip Ingram, telephone interview by author, 26 March 2011.

²⁰Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 194-95.

²¹Tony Jones, *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

²²Ken Silva, "Sacred Way of Tony Jones and the Emerging Church," *Apprising Ministries* (31 August 2008) [on-line]; accessed 10 May 2011; available from <http://apprising.org/2008/08/25/is-emergent-church-pastor-dan-kimball-really-a-conservative-evangelical/>; Internet.

interview, stated that he has personally asked Kimball to remove the endorsement and publically repent for his promotion of heretical teachings.²³ Silva said Kimball denied having knowledge of Jones' promotion of Christian mysticism or any other heretical teachings. Despite his concerns, Silva communicated that he is encouraged to see Kimball's disengagement with associates of Emergent Village.²⁴

Evangelical skepticism towards Kimball's theology is understandable, particularly in light of his recurring affiliation with and endorsement of Revisionists.²⁵ Kimball's reluctance to break ties with Revisionists is rooted in two primary sources. First, Kimball is a natural bridge builder, continuously seeking to find connection and partnership with others. Combining this characteristic with his desire to connect with those on the fringe of the church and society creates a unique dynamic where severing ties becomes an agonizing task.²⁶ Many of the members of the Revisionist stream were not simply colleagues but personal friends.

Second, Revisionist assessment of Christianity and culture resonated with Kimball. Kimball and Revisionists were largely in agreement regarding their diagnosis of

²³Ken Silva, telephone interview by author, 29 March 2011.

²⁴Ibid. Silva stated that he believes, since 2005, Kimball has been experiencing a theological shift towards orthodoxy; however, I contend Kimball's theology has not experienced a significant shift. What Silva perceives as a shift is nothing more than Kimball expressing his theology more clearly through more popular and easily accessible modes of media (e.g., *Outreach* magazine, *Leadership Journal*, Kimball's blog).

²⁵The uncertainty surrounding Kimball's position on the theological spectrum has ironically not been caused by a direct rejection or questioning of core doctrinal teachings. See Ken Silva, "Is Emergent Church Pastor Dan Kimball Really a 'Conservative Evangelical'?" (25 August 2008) [on-line]; accessed 12 January 2011; available at <http://apprising.org/2008/08/25/is-emergent-church-pastor-dan-kimball-really-a-conservative-evangelical/>; Internet.

²⁶Ingram, Seitz, and Wheeler provided similar testimonies asserting that Kimball's natural tendency is to find agreement with others – proponents and opponents alike. Ingram, interview, 26 March 2011. Darren Seitz, telephone interview by author, 14 March 2011. Brad Wheeler, telephone interview by author, 30 March 2011.

contemporary culture and why the church appeared impotent in reaching emerging generations. There is no question it must have been refreshing for Kimball to interact with others who were like-minded in their interpretations of culture. These relationships were cultivated in a context where young Christian leaders were gathered together for the purpose of recognizing better methodological practices for reaching emerging generations with the gospel.

The ECM's focus gradually shifted away from methodology toward theology as McLaren, Pagitt, Tony Jones, and others began to advocate a postmodern-friendly theology.²⁷ Kimball and Revisionists found agreement on their assessment of postmodern culture. They also found some agreement in how the church should respond to the cultural shift. Paradoxically, however, their agreement with respect to methodology was driven by distinctly dissimilar theologies.

Today, Kimball openly communicates his concern with Revisionist theology and his disappointment in how the ECM lost its original focus of reaching emerging generations. When asked about his emotions related to severing ties with those in the Revisionist's stream, Kimball candidly stated,

I gain joy and energy seeing the church extend her mission evangelistically. When the emerging church "discussion" got confusing due to a diversity of theology within it, it was sad to me because the energy focused on reaching the next generation was lost to some degree. The excitement for reaching people that was found in the earlier emerging church days got lost in the theological confusion. I also was good friends with some in the emerging church world and it is sad as we no longer see each other like we used to. They are very kind and good people. But I disagree with them (and they with me) on very key doctrines and approach to Scripture. I am sad we no longer hang out like we used to, as so often it was at events we spoke at together and planning meetings etc. I also have concern regarding the way younger Christians, who do not know theology or church history,

²⁷This shift is evidenced by Driscoll's frustration with and eventual departure from YLN. Driscoll, *Religion Saves*, 210.

are fairly easily brought into liberal theology because it matches culture so well. That is why recently I have been even more committed to teaching apologetics and doctrine. My emotions have been stirred enough to not just complain or worry, but to teach about these things.²⁸

Summary

Kimball's theological reputation is important because it directly impacts his credibility. Subsequently, a damaged credibility may negatively impact his ability to influence others. Kimball's theological reputation appears to be improving. This improvement is directly tied to the release of theological taxonomies provided by Stetzer and others, increased exposure to the ministries of other Relevantists, Kimball's growing reputation as a leader committed to conservative theology, and his increased protest against Revisionist theology.

Illustrating this improving reputation, in July 2009, Kimball was a guest on the Albert Mohler Radio Show. Mohler was one of the earliest evangelicals to speak out against emerging churches.²⁹ Guest host Russell Moore, Senior Vice President at SBTS, introduced Kimball as a respected evangelical leader and a leading cultural expert.³⁰ Moore went on to commend Kimball's book *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*. A second illustration of Kimball's improving reputation occurred in April 2011 when he partnered with well-respected evangelical leaders in the framing of the *Missional*

²⁸Dan Kimball, email to author, 12 April 2011.

²⁹Mohler expressed several of his early concerns with the ECM in an article entitled "What Should We Think of the Emerging Church?: Part One," *AlbertMohler.com* (29 June 2005) [on-line]; accessed 4 January 2008; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/06/29/what-should-we-think-of-the-emerging-church-part-one/>; Internet.

³⁰Russell Moore, "How Unbelievers View the Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball, Kevin DeYoung, and Ed Stetzer," *AlbertMohler.com* (30 July 2009) [on-line]; accessed 1 August 2009; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/30/how-unbelievers-view-the-church/>; Internet.

Manifesto.³¹ John Bohannon is correct to state “Kimball’s future leadership voice within the emerging church and broader scope of evangelicalism appears promising.”³²

Kimball’s Approach to Theology

Belief systems are undergirded by theological presuppositions, or assumptions. These presuppositions influence how one comes to and interprets doctrinal teachings. In order to gain a robust understanding of one’s belief system, it is critical to examine presuppositions and how they shape one’s theology. Understanding Kimball’s approach toward theology will assist in providing a framework in which to better interpret his theology. This section examines four presuppositions prominent in Kimball’s writings that shape his theological approach.

Theology is Central to Ministry

One of the early criticisms of emerging churches was they lacked a concern for doctrine and doctrinal certitude. Driving this notion was the belief many emerging churches had been infected by an advanced form of postmodern theology, resulting in a loss of belief in absolute truth.³³ This loss in absolute truth led to a lack of doctrinal

³¹A description of the *Missional Manifesto* is provided later in this chapter. “Missional Manifesto Framers,” *Mission Manifesto* [on-line]; accessed 13 April 2011; available from <http://www.missionalmanifesto.net/info.html>; Internet.

³²John Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders: Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt* (United States: Create Space Publishers, 2010), 54.

³³Progressive forms of postmodern theology, such as nihilism, are not the norm in emerging churches. Revisionist-led churches, adopting some form of postmodern theology, represent less than one-third of the entire movement. This estimate is based correspondence with Darrin Patrick, Scot McKnight, Ed Stetzer, Karen Ward, Bob Whitesel, and Tony Jones. Patrick, interview, 3 January 2008. Scot McKnight, email to author, 4 March 2007. Ed Stetzer, interview by author, Nashville, TN, 8 August 2008. Karen Ward, email to author, 14 May 2007. Bob Whitesel, telephone interview by author, 24 January 2007. Tony Jones, email to author, 12 September 2007.

conviction; consequently, theology became marginalized. Revisionist aversion to confessional Christianity and the Emergent Village's unwillingness to adopt a statement of faith provided the evidence necessary to form such a conclusion.

Relevants did not share this aversion to doctrine and doctrinal certitude. Robert Webber went so far to claim that a loss of theology extending throughout all of evangelicalism was a driving force for the ECM's birth.³⁴ Kimball, as addressed in the previous section, has not always communicated his theology with the greatest of depth. His inefficiencies, however, are dissipating with his growing theological perspicacity and should not be interpreted as a prior lack of doctrinal concern. In fact, theology and teaching theology are central to Kimball and his ministry, as illustrated by the following three examples.

First, Kimball states specifically that theology is important to him. He writes,

For me, theology is incredibly important and I love opening a Bible, discussing and even arguing among friends about differences of opinion on things... Theology is a living, relationally dynamic thing – it is not stagnant. Theology impacts everything we do in our churches.³⁵

Kimball, in *The Emerging Church*, writes that he senses a renewed hunger for deep theological exploration by emerging generations.³⁶ He contends churches need to move toward preaching and teaching that is more theological and theocentric, and away from anthropocentric preaching.

³⁴Robert Webber, "Introduction: The Interaction of Culture and Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 15. Carson describes emerging churches' protest against the anemic theology espoused by seeker-driven churches in *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 36-41.

³⁵Kimball, "Humble Theology," 222.

³⁶Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 178.

Second, Kimball emphasizes the importance of theology at VFC. The mission statement of Vintage Faith Church is to see God transform their membership into a “Worshiping Community of Missional Theologians.”³⁷ The church’s mission to develop theologians is intentionally fleshed out through the church’s ministries. For example, in VFC’s new member course, an entire section of the teaching materials is devoted to describing the church’s expectations for members to become theologians. One portion reads, “We believe that in our culture today, the church needs to strive to be theologians more than ever. At Vintage Faith Church, we are passionate about creating a culture where becoming a theologian can be encouraged.”³⁸ Membership requires a commitment to a theological covenant. Included in the covenant is the following statement, “I covenant to take responsibility for my own theological growth (and my children’s if I am a parent) and to ‘feeding myself’ from the Scriptures during the week so that I will worship God more holistically as I understand more about who He is.”³⁹

Third, Kimball’s writings are becoming increasingly doctrinally centered. Kimball, a contributor to *Leadership* journal and *Outreach* magazine, has historically written articles highlighting aspects of ministry practice; however, he has recently dedicated a significant portion to doctrinal issues foundational to Christianity. Addressing this shift, he states,

Yes, we absolutely have to be teaching about love, grace, living out the fruits of the Spirit, justice and compassion. The Pharisees had all their doctrines right, but their hearts were cold. So I’m not suggesting that our sole focus be on doctrines and beliefs without emphasizing heart and life issues. But I have a growing

³⁷“The Vision of Vintage Faith Church.” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 12 February 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision>; Internet.

³⁸“Section Six: Theologians,” *Vintage Faith Church New Members Class Materials*, 1.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

suspicion that we need to be preparing those in our churches with more solid teaching about some of these critical doctrines so that as they hear that others might perceive them as closed-minded, hateful or fearful, they are able to intelligently and lovingly give reasons for their beliefs.⁴⁰

Antithetical to many emerging church leaders, Kimball is writing articles that are increasingly focused on the Christian's mandate to evangelize as opposed to the Christian's mandate to be involved in social-justice ministry. He writes,

Those of us who have been Christians a long time and were ingrained with a reductionist form of the Gospel that focused only on the cross and death, resurrection of Jesus and payment of sin have welcomed the infusion of a healthy holistic theology that includes seeing the kingdom of heaven come to earth. But emerging generations are often solely learning the Gospel as an emphasis on justice. They actively participate in justice projects and stay aware of global happenings. However I am concerned that they aren't learning about the importance of evangelism.... I dread to think of the lives who won't be helped by the church and Christians in 50 years through acts of mercy and justice if we aren't evangelizing and seeing emerging generations of new Christians coming to know Jesus as Savior today.⁴¹

Kimball's shift towards a doctrinal focus in his writings is due in part to the aforementioned imbalance he perceives among younger Christians.⁴² He also feels a strong theological emphasis is essential because emerging generations can be easily drawn toward liberal theology that mirrors contemporary culture in its concern for mercy ministries.⁴³

⁴⁰Dan Kimball, "You're Not a Fundamentalist If...", *Outreach*, November/December 2010, 24-25. Kimball's heightened focus on doctrine in his writings is evidenced by the number of articles he has recently published on the doctrine of hell. Kimball states that he has chosen to write on hell because emerging generations value transparency and the church should not conceal the hard teachings of the Bible. Dan Kimball, "Dan Kimball on Heaven, Hell, and Evangelism," *Outreach*, March/April 2011, 24; idem, "Hell: The Subject We Must Not Avoid," *Outreach*, November/December 2010, 27; idem, "Hot Theology," *Leadership*, Winter 2008, 102; idem, "Teaching the Truth about Hell," *Outreach*, May/June 2008, 24.

⁴¹Dan Kimball, "Justice Needs Evangelism," *Outreach*, September/October 2010, 24.

⁴²Kimball, "Dan Kimball on Heaven, Hell, and Evangelism."

⁴³Dan Kimball, email to author, 12 April 2011.

Theology Is Shaped by Ancient Christianity

A common characteristic of emerging churches, including VFC, is a desire to reach into the past to connect with ancient, or at least historic, Christianity.⁴⁴ Kimball states that seeker-driven churches, responding to cultural perceptions, removed much of the Christian symbolism from their buildings and suppressed language deemed offensive or confusing to the unchurched.⁴⁵ Kimball seeks to reverse these modifications by reintroducing elements of ancient Christianity to emerging generations.⁴⁶

Reintroducing ancient Christianity took on many forms in emerging churches. A greater emphasis is placed on the sacraments and an articulation of their symbolism.⁴⁷ Developing in many emerging churches was a desire to create a “house church” feel in order to more accurately reflect early church gatherings. Intimacy in worship spaces became a priority, resulting in emerging churches replacing pews with chairs, and in some instances recliners and couches.⁴⁸ Seating was often rearranged into a circular

⁴⁴Much of the spirit behind the ECM’s desire to reconnect with ancient Christianity is captured in Robert Webber’s four book series entitled *Ancient-Future*. The premise behind Webber’s writings is that the contemporary church needs to reexamine and emulate the teachings and practices of the early church. This reconnection is of increased importance today due to the similarities shared between postmodern culture and the culture of the first century. Webber provides a short summary describing the connection between what he calls the “Ancient-Future Vision” and the emerging church in *Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*. Robert Webber, “Appendix 2: What is the Ancient-Future Vision?” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 213-15.

⁴⁵Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 25-26.

⁴⁶See “Vintage Faith Strives to Reflect the Ancient Roots and Values of Early Christianity,” *Vintage Faith* [on-line]; accessed 21 July 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision/roots>: Internet.

⁴⁷Andy Crouch, “Life after Postmodernity,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 82.

⁴⁸Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, MN is one example of an emerging church whose worship space is filled with recliners and couches and arranged in a circular pattern. Solomon’s Porch was planted by Doug Pagitt in 2000. Kimball provides a suggested model for “a vintage-Christianity approach to the set-up of a worship gathering” in *The Emerging Church*, 249.

pattern. Spaces of worship were often comprised of candles and dim lighting, symbolic of the early church's simplicity.

Emerging churches also made concerted efforts to adjoin with ancient Christianity by emphasizing elements of liturgical worship.⁴⁹ Many emerging churches reclaimed the practice of reading ancient doctrinal creeds and singing hymns. Such practices are valued because of their roots in historical Christianity. They also commonly adopted ancient doctrinal creeds, such as the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, as their doctrinal statements.

Kimball's ministry at VFC mirrors this yearning to recapture ancient Christianity; in fact, the name of the church, Vintage Faith Church, was chosen because of the church's desire "to reflect the 'vintage' values of the early church and teachings of Jesus."⁵⁰ Like many emerging churches, VFC has adopted the Nicene Creed as part of their doctrinal statement. Adhering to the Nicene Creed, according to Kimball, establishes the church's commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy.⁵¹ It also communicates to congregants that the theology guiding VFC is trustworthy, having stood the test of time. Adopting the Nicene Creed also bonds VFC congregants with believers throughout church history who have joined in their allegiance to the ancient creed.

⁴⁹Liturgical worship, according to Timothy Quill, is profoundly biblical. Quill, an expert historian on liturgical worship, writes "Holy Scripture and the doctrine of justification shape the content and structure of the Liturgy. Therefore, it is Trinitarian, Christological, sacramental, and eschatological in nature. Almost all of the text of the Liturgy is, word-for-word, directly from the Bible. Thus we are not hearing and speaking man's words, but the very Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Timothy C. J. Quill, "Liturgical Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 25.

⁵⁰"The History of Vintage Faith Church," *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 12 February 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/history>; Internet.

⁵¹Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 92.

Emerging churches leaders are also drawn to ancient doctrinal creeds because creeds are associated with historic Christianity as opposed to a specific Christian tradition or denomination. The complexity and perceived discord of American Christian denominationalism is confusing to emerging generations. Hence, emerging churches are more apt to connect themselves to doctrinal statements anchored in ancient Christianity.⁵²

Doctrinal Statements Are Limiting

Kimball maintains that doctrinal statements are limiting in their ability to express the fullness of the Christian faith. Literature produced by VFC states, “The entire Bible really contains our ‘doctrinal statement,’ so creating a small, selective list of verses from the Bible to represent what a church believes is not an easy thing to do. In reality, you could have dozens of pages about specific beliefs.”⁵³ Kimball also feels concise statements of belief are limiting because they do not express the resulting life change, heart passion, and relational dynamic between God and man.⁵⁴

Kimball’s understanding of doctrinal statements as limiting is also tied to the sense of awe and mystery he believes Christians should have when considering the

⁵²Kimball’s anecdotal research reveals that emerging generations view the American church as “organized religion,” with each denomination manufacturing “cookie cutter” Christians who adhere to a narrow understanding of Christianity. The church is perceived as functioning like a corporation and pursuing a political agenda, embodying hierarchy, control, and arrogance. Dan Kimball, “I Love Jesus. Not the Church,” *Outreach*, March/April 2007, 68.

⁵³“Section Two: The Doctrinal Beliefs of Our Church,” *Vintage Faith New Members Course Materials*, 1.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 5. As Stetzer illustrates in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, holding a close relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy is a common theme in the writings of ECM leaders, including Kimball. Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective,” 60-62, 68-69. The Revisionist stream of the ECM focuses heavily on the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, but they hold to a perverted understanding in placing emphasis on orthopraxy over orthodoxy. This perversion is not a new concept to those familiar with historical liberal theology. Adolf von Harnack, the 19th century German theologian, made similar claims, stating, “True faith in Jesus is not a matter of creedal orthodoxy but of doing as he did.” Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 5th ed. (London: Benn, 1958), x.

teachings of Scripture. Man is a limited being viewing the things of God through a dimly lit mirror, according to Kimball, and man should not presume to have the ability to gain perfect or complete knowledge. He writes,

It seemed that maybe we as human beings ended up coming up with a lot of very concise theological answers about things that maybe we just can't be quite as certain of. (However, at the same time, I do believe we absolutely need to be certain about some things as I will explain later.) Perhaps we are supposed to approach theology more with a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery than like trying to solve a mathematical puzzle.⁵⁵

In summation, Kimball believes doctrinal statements are important in unifying believers around core doctrines.⁵⁶ However, doctrinal statements possess a limited capacity to express the fullness of Christian belief and how that belief should be manifested in the Christian life. Kimball acknowledges that early in ministry, his depreciation of doctrinal statement was partially due to his naivety in believing Christians generally held to the same core beliefs. Today, he claims to have a greater appreciation for doctrinal statements and their necessary role in defining theological terms.⁵⁷

Theology Is to Be Approached with Humility

As suggested above, Kimball believes one should approach theology with an appropriate level of humility. Kimball aims to balance the tension between confidently

⁵⁵Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 91.

⁵⁶According to Kimball, core doctrines include, but are not limited to, verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement by Jesus, and the bodily resurrection and future return of Jesus. Kimball, "Humble Theology, 216.

⁵⁷This information was taken from a November 2010 radio interview between Kimball and Chris Rosebrough of Pirate Christian Radio. In the interview, Rosebrough asked Kimball what mistakes in his past he would like to correct. "Dan Kimball on the Record," *Apprising Ministries* [on-line]; interview conducted by Chris Rosebrough; accessed 15 March 2011; available from <http://apprising.org/2010/11/20/dan-kimball-on-the-record/>; Internet.

embracing one's theological convictions while maintaining a humble disposition as one continues to explore theology. Expounding on the idea, he writes on the VFC website,

In our church, we live with the tension of holding a "humble theology." Holding a "humble theology" means we approach the Scriptures recognizing our inadequacies as human beings to determine with 100% certainty every single thing in the Bible. Even though we live with a "humble theology," it doesn't mean that we cannot make certain theological conclusions. There are many Scriptural truths and doctrines that have been held throughout the 2,000 year history of the church which we as Vintage Faith Church believe are central to the Christian faith.⁵⁸

Pursuing a "humble theology" is an idea Kimball articulates most extensively in an essay entitled "Humble Theology: Re-exploring Doctrine While Holding on to Truth."⁵⁹ He encapsulates the concept of a "humble theology" with four governing ideas. First, Christians can and should hold certain beliefs as truth and not feel arrogant or close-minded when they do. Kimball affirms an element of mystery to the things of God, yet one can still confidently hold certain teachings that God has revealed to us as absolute truth. Responding to the assumptions of some that emerging churches do not possess theological convictions, Kimball writes, "I am not ashamed nor do I feel 'unemerging' in saying that I hold to and will even defend some core or fundamental beliefs. We don't have to feel close-minded or overly dogmatic when saying we hold to certain truths."⁶⁰

⁵⁸"Living with a Humble Theology, *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 13 July 2010; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/theology/humble-theology>; Internet.

⁵⁹Kimball, "Humble Theology."

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 223. The imprecise language of Kimball's quote is addressed on pages 163-64. Assumptions that emerging church leaders avoid doctrinal convictions find their grounding in the statements of Revisionists such as Tony Jones, the founding National Coordinator of Emergent Village. Jones is quoted in *Relevant* magazine stating, "Statements of faith are about drawing borders, which means you have to load your weapons and place soldiers at those borders. It becomes an obsession to guard the boarders. That is simply not the ministry of Jesus." Peter J. Walker and Tyler Clark, "Missing the Point: The Absolute Truth behind Postmodernism, Emergent, and the Emerging Church," *Relevant* [on-line]; accessed 12 July 2008; available from http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god_article.php?id=7434; Internet. Jones reveals the depths of his theological liberalism in stating, "I can intellectually imagine any particular piece of belief being overturned by some experience, someone's arguments, something." Tony Jones, interview by author, Edina, MN, 19 May 2008.

Second, theological “rethinking” is not a weakness. Kimball writes,

At the same time we hold to certain truths, it is also a wonderful thing to be open to discussing all types of new thinking and rethinking and to be willing to learn. Discussing and rethinking theology is exciting. It is not a weakness to be open to hearing other viewpoints and even to be challenged in what we may believe. In fact I think it is a weakness when we are not willing to do this, as it may mean either we don’t have confidence in what we believe or we are afraid or close-minded (in a negative way) and unwilling to discuss anything.⁶¹

Kimball realizes that language such as “theological rethinking” may cause unease for some; thus, he makes a qualifying statement that “rethinking” is not an appropriate endeavor for the core teachings of Christianity. “Rethinking” should be relegated to those teachings where those within evangelicalism find disagreement.⁶²

Kimball is concerned that some Christians are overly rigid in their theology.

Expounding on this concern, he states,

One of the most embarrassing things about being a Christian today is being associated with other Christians who are so rigid in their theology that they go into a “defend and attack” mode with anyone who says something different from what they believe, even about the more minor doctrines. Please understand that I believe doctrine is very, very important. As I shared earlier, in our church we do have a doctrinal statement. But I wonder if we sometimes go too far developing such detailed doctrinal statements and absolute conclusions about certain beliefs that exceed the core and fundamental issues. It seems that some of us who go into detailed doctrinal statements get very defensive if someone believes otherwise about even small issues. We can subtly take on a “my doctrinal statement can beat up your doctrinal statement” type of attitude.⁶³

Kimball’s aversion to highly developed theological belief systems is first tied to his desire to maintain what he believes is an appropriate degree of wonder surrounding the things of God. Kimball, aligning with the sentiment of emerging generations, places a

⁶¹Kimball, “Humble Theology,” 223.

⁶²Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” 91.

⁶³Kimball, “Humble Theology,” 221-22.

heightened value on mystery in the Christian faith.⁶⁴ Kimball's reluctance to be identified within a particular theological group, as one interviewer attempted to do in referring to him as a Calvinist, is also ultimately driven by a belief that Scripture does not allow for absolute conclusions on some non-fundamental theological teachings.⁶⁵

Third, a "humble theology" is to remember that humans are inherently sinful and possess personal biases. Recognizing human limitations cultivates humility as we approach God's teachings. Kimball writes,

We should also never forget that we are sin tainted, imperfect human beings. Recognizing this should cause us to have some humility in our approach. Yes, we have the Spirit to guide us, but even so, there are many godly, wonderful, Spirit-filled people who sincerely study and pray and ask the Spirit to guide them, yet they come to different conclusions.⁶⁶

This cautionary suggestion is a reminder that Christians have a responsibility to discern truth as revealed by God's Word while realizing the limitations of human reasoning.

Fourth, a "humble theology" is to be loving and gracious to others when disagreements occur. Kimball expounds on how to rightly engage disagreement:

Throughout the New Testament we are constantly reminded that a sign of being a follower of Jesus is our love for each other (John 15:17). In Galatians 5:22-23 we are taught that we should bear the fruit of the Spirit... When we have disagreements among ourselves, do we demonstrate these characteristics in how we speak about each other and in our attitudes toward one another? I am not saying we should passively let anyone say any theological idea he or she wants to say without

⁶⁴Addressing the ECM's "post-systematic" theology, Scot McKnight writes, "The emerging movement tends to be suspicious of systematic theology. Why? Not because we don't read systematics, but because the diversity of theologies alarms us, no genuine consensus has been achieved, God didn't reveal a systematic theology but a storied narrative, and no language is capable of capturing the Absolute Truth who alone is God. Frankly, the emerging movement loves ideas and theology. It just doesn't have an airtight system or statement of faith." Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key Elements of the most Controversial and Misunderstood Movement in the Church Today," *Christianity Today* (19 January 2007) [on-line]; accessed 9 February 2007; available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=40534; Internet.

⁶⁵"Dan Kimball on the Record."

⁶⁶Kimball, "Humble Theology," 223.

argument. I argue and debate with friends about theological issues all the time. But I hope I do so with love and with gentleness and respect.⁶⁷

Kimball's approach to theology calls for humility, yet humility devoid of theological conviction is dangerous and not reflective of what the Bible teaches.

Summary

Kimball's approach to theology is influenced by these presuppositions: theology is central to ministry, theology is shaped by ancient Christianity, doctrinal statements are limiting, and theology is to be approached with humility. These presuppositions not only influence how Kimball's theology is categorized and communicated, but also how theology is manifested in his personal life.

Doctrinal Positions of Kimball

Kimball is a recognized leader in the area of emerging generational ministry. He is well-known for his analysis of postmodern culture and for creating innovative methodologies for reaching and ministering to emerging generations. Kimball's giftedness as a practitioner is established; however, he is not first and foremost regarded as an academic scholar or theologian – which is not to suggest that theology is not of utmost importance to Kimball or that he does not enjoy deep theological study.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., 223-24.

⁶⁸Kimball acknowledges he is not an academic scholar in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*. Kimball, admitting to not possessing the academic credentials of the other book contributors, writes, "I am not a scholar. Therefore, both my approach and writing style in this chapter will reflect the perspective of a pastor and practitioner rather than a professional scholar." Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 288. Kimball, however, is an avid reader of theological works. On his blog, he has a column on the right hand side titled "Books by the Bed" which lists the books he is currently reading. The majority of the books are usually theological in nature. As of August 22, 2011, Kimball's book list include Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); John H. Walton, *Genesis*, in vol. 1 of *The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry C. Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); and Scot McKnight, *One Life: Jesus Calls, We Follow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

The purpose of this section is to investigate Kimball's beliefs on those teachings central to the Christian faith, the teachings on which Christianity stands or falls and the denial of such would result in a loss of the Christian faith. This section will examine the doctrinal statements he affirms and doctrinal teachings evident in his writings and speaking. Attention is primarily given toward his view of Scripture, Christology, the gospel, and Ecclesiology. This section will reveal that Kimball's doctrinal positions are consistent with evangelicalism.

Doctrine of Scripture

It has been the practice of some evangelicals to unintentionally misrepresent the postmodern impact upon emerging leaders' view of Scripture. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, writing an essay intended to inform evangelicals of the ECM's view of Scripture, succumb to this mistake by focusing their essay entirely on Revisionist stream representatives Stanley Grenz and Brian McLaren.⁶⁹ From the outset of this essay, the reader is led to assume Grenz and McLaren represent a significant contingency of the ECM.⁷⁰ No one or two individuals can adequately represent ECM's view of Scripture.

⁶⁹Geisler and Howe, realizing that no two individuals can completely represent a movement, provide the qualifying statement, "Since space will not permit discussing all so-called postmodern evangelicals on Scripture, two major proponents will be examined: Stanley Grenz and Brian McLaren. Grenz, now beatified and enlightened, was the philosopher of the movement; and McLaren is one of the foremost proponents of the emerging (postmodern) church." Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, "A Postmodern View of Scripture," in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 92.

⁷⁰Researching for the book *The Organic Church: Learning from Twelve Emerging Churches*, Bob Whitesel studied the beliefs and practices of thirty-five emerging churches. Lecturing at the National Outreach Convention in 2006, Whitesel addressed many of the misperceptions surrounding emerging churches. He stated, "The vast majority of leaders in the emerging church are theologically conservative, particularly those leaders who are practioners and pastors. Theologically progressive leaders represent the vast minority of the ECM." Bob Whitesel, "Elastic Evangelism," *National Outreach Convention 2006* [CD-ROM], 9 November 2006.

However, if forced to select one person to represent the teachings of the ECM, according to Andrew Jones and Scot McKnight, Kimball is a good choice.⁷¹

Kimball possesses strong convictions about Scripture. These convictions find their basis in three foundational thoughts. First, Jesus' teachings placed a high value on Scripture.⁷² Jesus, according to Kimball, read, quoted, and taught Scripture. Jesus' life revealed a significant value placed on Scripture; therefore, it makes sense that followers of Christ should do the same.

Second, Scripture testifies within its pages its role in aiding individuals in knowing and loving God.⁷³ Kimball, recognizing the importance of Scripture in spiritual formation, believes Scripture plays a central role for producing faith, helping with temptation, nourishing and guiding believers, teaching wisdom, and providing spiritual insight.

Third, Scripture is inspired by God.⁷⁴ Kimball defines inspiration in the following terms,

When I say I believe in the inspiration of Scriptures, I am saying I believe in God's superintending of the human authors of the Bible by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16),

⁷¹Jones, an early leader and commentator in the ECM, calls Kimball the "centrist" of the movement, stating that Kimball's beliefs and ministry most closely reflect the heart of the ECM. Andrew Jones, "The Skinny on the Emerging Church in the USA," *Tall Skinny Kiwi* [on-line]; accessed 9 February 2011; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/The_Skinny_on_the_Emerging_Church_in_USA_by_Andrew_Jones.html; Internet. Scot McKnight states, "[The ECM] has no central offices, and it is as varied as evangelicalism itself. If I were to point to one centrist expression of the emerging movement in the U.S., it would be Dan Kimball's Vintage Church in Santa Cruz, California." McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church."

⁷²Kimball references Matt 4:4; 5:21, 27, 31; 27:46, Mark 2:25, Luke 4:1-21; 7:27; 18:20; 24:25-32. Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 95.

⁷³Kimball references Ps 119:11, 30, 105, Ro 10:17, 2 Tim 3:14-17, Heb 4:12, Jas 1:25, 1 Pet 2:1-2. Ibid., 96.

⁷⁴Kimball references Mark 12:36, 2 Tim 2:36, 2 Pet 1:21. Ibid.

allowing them to use their individual personalities and writing styles to compose the Bible. So exactly what God wanted in the original manuscripts is what is included in them.⁷⁵

For these reasons, Kimball claims to Scripture as his authority and guide for life.⁷⁶ He desires for Scripture to gain greater prominence in his life and in the life of emerging churches. He writes, “I believe we need to be teaching the Bible in the emerging church with depth and zeal, saturating our churches with Scriptures in everything we do.”⁷⁷ Kimball longs to see people fall in love with Scripture, not as a how-to helps guide, but rather for transformation that leads to loving and worshiping God.⁷⁸

Kimball adheres to four doctrinal statements – each reflecting an evangelical view of Scripture. First, Kimball claims allegiance to both the Nicene and the Apostle’s Creed, arguably the two most widely used creeds in Christian liturgy.⁷⁹ Neither of these ancient creeds speaks directly to the Bible’s inspiration and truthfulness, but they are implicit in that the statements’ entire content is built on the presuppositions that the Bible is God’s inspired word. The Nicene Creed does speak to the historical reliability of the Bible in stating, “On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.”⁸⁰

⁷⁵Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 189.

⁷⁶Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” 96.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 97.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 40-41, 91-92. Kimball, interview, 10 May 2010.

⁸⁰Regarding adherence to The Nicene Creed, VFC’s website reads, “The Nicene Creed is a beautiful creed written during the fourth and fifth centuries AD, expressing the heart of the several doctrines which are critical in the understanding of who Jesus is and His relationship to the Father and the Spirit.” Below this statement are the words of The Nicene Creed. “We Believe in the Truths in the Nicene Creed,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/theology/truths-in-the-nicene-creed>; Internet.

Second, Kimball adheres to the VFC doctrinal statement. Regarding the Bible, it reads, “We believe that the Bible is fully inspired by God, that it is entirely trustworthy and is our guide for faith and life.” This statement refers to Scripture as “inspired” – the word Kimball utilizes most often in describing his understanding of the Bible.⁸¹ Consistent with Kimball’s emphasis on orthopraxy, the statement concludes with stating that belief in the Bible is intended to lead to right living.

Third, Kimball affirms the Lausanne Covenant, penned in 1974 and recognized as one of the most influential documents in modern evangelical Christianity.⁸² Conservative evangelicals view the Lausanne Covenant in high esteem because it affirms both the Bible’s inerrancy and infallibility.⁸³ Kimball’s affirmation of the Lausanne Covenant surprised some ECM observers, but Kimball maintains the covenant reflects what he has always believed about the Bible.⁸⁴

Kimball uses two prominent metaphors to describe his view of Scripture. First, a “compass” represents Kimball’s understanding of how Scripture is to be a light, source, or guide for Christians.⁸⁵ This metaphor provides him space to allow mystery in his theological approach. Kimball writes,

⁸¹Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 189.

⁸²“The Lausanne Covenant,” *The Lausanne Movement* [on-line], accessed 10 May 2010, available from <http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>; Internet. The Lausanne Covenant reads, “We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

⁸³The Lausanne Covenant reads, “We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

⁸⁴“Dan Kimball on the Record.”

⁸⁵Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” 96.

A compass gives direction but doesn't go into specifics. I see the Bible as a spiritually-inspired compass, where it gives us strong direction and even gives specifics about many things. But at the same time, there are some topics and things we wish we could have specific answers to, but they remain more of a mystery. It gives direction rather than acting as a how-to-answer book.⁸⁶

He concludes this thought in stating that the Bible provides sufficient guidance, no matter the cultural setting or time period, to help Christians recognize and travel the right path.

The Bible as an “anchor” represents the second metaphor.⁸⁷ An anchored boat has the capacity to drift, but only so far. Similarly, the Bible keeps Christians tethered to a set of immovable core beliefs while allowing some drifting, or diversity, of beliefs in areas of non-essentials.⁸⁸

Concerning his hermeneutical approach to Scripture, Kimball comes to the Bible reading it both diachronically and synchronically.⁸⁹ A diachronic approach to

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., 97.

⁸⁸As the metaphors imply, Kimball does not seek to be overly systematic in his theology. He does not feel the need to be locked-in to a particular theological system. Dan Kimball, “Response to Mark Driscoll,” 40.

⁸⁹Kimball does not use “diachronic” and “synchronic” language to describe his approach to reading the Scriptures; however, the concept is articulated in *Adventures in Churchland* and illustrated through a diagram. Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland: Discovering the Beautiful Mess Jesus Loves*, advanced copy edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 223-24. The diagram divides biblical history into four broad chronological periods: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Kimball maintains that the modern church focused almost exclusively on fall and redemption aspects of the biblical storyline to the neglect of creation and restoration – resulting in the neglect of mercy ministries. Kimball writes, “It’s incredibly encouraging to see how the evangelical church has awoken to the need for global activism and justice as Jesus and the Scriptures teach. Ibid., 224. The Gospel Coalition’s definitions for diachronic and synchronic are as follows: Diachronic Approach: “To read across the whole Bible is to collect its declarations, summons, promises, and truth-claims into categories of thought (e.g., theology, Christology, eschatology) and arrive at a coherent understanding of what it teaches summarily (e.g., Luke 24:46-47). In this perspective, the gospel appears as God, sin, Christ, faith. It brings out the means of salvation, namely the substitutionary work of Christ and our responsibility to embrace it by faith.” Synchronic Approach: “To read along the whole Bible is to discern the single basic plot-line of the Bible as God’s story of redemption (e.g., Luke 24:44) as well as the themes of the Bible (e.g., covenant, kinship, temple) that run through every stage of history and every part of the canon, climaxing in Jesus Christ. In this perspective, the gospel appears as creation, fall, redemption, restoration. It brings out the purpose of salvation, namely, a renewed creation.” “Theological Vision for Ministry,” *The Gospel Coalition* [on-line], accessed 10 February 2008, available from <http://www.the-gospel-coalition.org/about/theological-vision-for-ministry>; Internet.

reading the Bible is more characteristic of evangelical theology, focusing on propositional statements and resulting in a more individualistic faith. This approach naturally leads to a heightened focus on personal salvation and a reduced focus on corporate aspects of redemption, namely justice and mercy for the oppressed.

A synchronic approach to reading the Bible focuses on the meta-narrative of Scripture and results in a more corporate understanding of faith. Reading the Bible synchronically typically leads one to dwell on creation redemption through social justice and mercy ministries. Hoping to avoid the false dichotomy of emphasizing one or the other, Kimball's dualistic approach seeks a balanced position that reads the Bible for both its overarching story of God's restoration of creation and for its specific declarations and propositional claims. This dualistic approach's influence on Kimball's theology is most evident in its impact on his view on Christian responsibility to be involved in creation restoration through mercy ministries.⁹⁰

In summation, Kimball possesses an evangelical position regarding the doctrine of Scripture, especially as stated in the Lausanne Covenant. His hermeneutical approach allows him to lay claim to biblical essentials while creating space for mystery and interpret the Bible from both a corporate and individualistic perspective. His humble approach takes pleasure in affirming essentials of the faith while welcoming differences of opinion on doctrines where evangelical Christians can find disagreement (e.g., eschatology, church polity, the mode of baptism, the role of women in ministry).⁹¹

⁹⁰Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 224.

⁹¹Kimball references these areas of doctrine when listing those teachings evangelicals can agree to disagree. Dan Kimball, interview by author, Marion, IN, 11 November 2010.

Christology

As highlighted by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, most emerging churches place a strong emphasis on the gospels and the teachings of Jesus.⁹² They focus heavily on the kingdom of God and how the gospel, as modeled by Christ, is to be lived out in the here and now. Emerging generations, disconnected from and suspicious of the church, continue to hold a favorable view of Jesus.⁹³ Reflective of the movement at large, Kimball's ministry gives significant attention to Jesus and His ministry. This reality accentuates the importance of comprehending Kimball's Christology.

Kimball's most thorough Christological examination is found in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*. The chapter of Christology is amusingly entitled "Jesus as Son of God and Plastic Action Figure." Kimball begins the chapter examining how Jesus is marketed today and the fascination within contemporary culture that surrounds Him. Kimball then presents two different types, or perceptions, of Jesus. First, he presents Jesus informally, as a buddy or friend.⁹⁴ He illustrates the point by referencing a popular tee shirt worn by celebrities that reads "Jesus is My Homeboy." On the other end of the spectrum, Jesus is presented as an angry avenging figure.⁹⁵ Kimball also presents variations between these extremes, including a cultural-savvy Jesus who advocates for the oppressed.⁹⁶

⁹²Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 47-48.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁴Kimball, "They Like Jesus but Not the Church," 50-51.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 55.

Kimball contrasts these depictions of Jesus with “Vintage” Jesus, using the term “vintage” to refer to how the Bible portrays Jesus.⁹⁷ He prefaces his articulation of “Vintage” Jesus by stating, “I don’t intend to get into a theological discussion of who Jesus is, since there are volumes and volumes of scripturally based books that do that.”⁹⁸ Seemingly contradictory, he enters into a theologically rich Christological discourse.

When I think of Jesus, I think of the triune God, who eternally exists in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – coeternal in being, coeternal in nature, coequal in power and glory, all three persons having the same attributes and perfections (Deut. 6:4, 2 Cor. 13:14). These terms may sound technical to people, but these ideas are so incredibly hard to grasp that technical words sometimes convey them better than emotional responses. I think of Jesus as one who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-31). He was a Jewish rabbi (John 1:38), a teacher who astonished people with his insight and his authoritative teaching (Matt. 7:28-29) I think of his heart breaking with compassion for people (Matt. 9:36) and how he wept for people, even for those who rejected him (Luke 19:41). I think of the Jesus who was an advocate for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19; Matt. 19:16-30; Luke 14:13; Matt. 25:31-46). I think of the one who stood strong against the religious legalism of his day (Luke 20:19-20). I think of the one who not only drank wine but also provided it (John 2:1-11). I think of the one who didn’t just sit in a holy huddle or point out the wrongs of culture but hung out with sinners and ate with them (Matt. 9:10). I think of the Jesus who was tempted and understands temptation yet was sinless (Heb. 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). I think of the Jesus who was sent by God because of his great love for humanity to take on our sin (John 1:1-2, 14, 29; 3:16-21). I think of the Jesus who accomplished our redemption through his death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice and then was bodily resurrected from the dead (Rom. 3:24; 1 Peter 2:24). I think of the Jesus who appeared to his disciples and said that they have a mission not to create an inwardly focused community and to complain about the world but rather to go out and with the power of the Spirit live missional lives, bringing the light of Jesus to others (Acts 1:8). I think of the Jesus who sees the church as his bride (Rev. 21:2, 9) and loves the church, even when we disappoint him. I think of the Jesus who ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God, where, as our High Priest, he intercedes for us and serves as our advocate (Acts 1:9-10; Heb. 7:25; 9:24). I also think, soberly, of the Jesus who will one day come again to judge the living and the dead (1Peter 4:5; Rom. 14:9; 2 Tim. 4:1). Jesus is our

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

friend and the friend of sinners, but he also is a righteous judge who will hold us all accountable one day for how we lived our lives.⁹⁹

Kimball concludes by challenging Christians to embrace a balanced, multi-faceted Jesus by highlighting all aspects of his humanity and deity. He writes, “I so desire for others to experience the full Jesus, not just the good teacher or the friend but also the Lord of Lords and King of Kings and the Savior who changes lives.”¹⁰⁰

Darrell Bock, Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, commended Kimball for his “Vintage Jesus” in stating,

I could not have said it better myself. Jesus is not a one-dimensional figure. He is multidimensional and comes in high-def. He touches every corner of our lives and challenges us at a variety of levels, not as a mere teacher or guide, but as Lord and Savior. He sees down to the pixels of our lives. Such an Emergent Christology is biblical. It not only sets Jesus in His ancient context but reminds us that the cultural Jesuses of our world are not reflections of a faith that appreciates Jesus as the uniquely sent and exalted One from God.¹⁰¹

Kimball’s Christological discourse provides a helpful framework for understanding Kimball’s view of Jesus – a view that aligns with evangelical theology. The description affirms essential evangelical teachings including the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the hypostatic union, substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, and Christ’s position in the Trinity. Kimball also emphasizes dimensions of Jesus that strongly resonate with emerging leaders: Jesus’ concern for society’s marginalized and the missional focus of His ministry.¹⁰²

⁹⁹Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 57.

¹⁰¹Darrell Bock, “Emergent/Emerging Christologies,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 165-66.

¹⁰²Gibbs and Bolger list nine practices, including the two referenced, as characterizing emerging churches. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 45.

Kimball, as previously discussed, affirms several doctrinal statements that align with historical Christian orthodoxy. The Nicene Creed, the Apostle's Creed, the Lausanne Covenant, and VFC's statement of faith convey an evangelical view of Christology.¹⁰³

Kimball is also a framer of the aforementioned *Missional Manifesto*.¹⁰⁴ The manifesto's purpose, according to its preamble, is to serve churches as they seek to understand their call to be missional and to help churches theologically understand and practically live out God's mission in the world today. The sixth affirmation of the *Missional Manifesto* is titled "Christocentric" and reads,

We believe that Jesus is the center of God's plan. By extension, the church as the body of Christ is the primary medium of God's mission to His world. We affirm that while God's work and presence is not limited to the church, nonetheless the proclamation of the gospel of Christ comes through the church and believers everywhere. Members of the church, living by the power of the Spirit, are being conformed into the likeness of Christ in their attitudes and actions.¹⁰⁵

The *Missional Manifesto* aligns with Kimball's "Vintage" Jesus in emphasizing Jesus' role as a missionary to the world. In summation, Kimball adheres to an evangelical understanding of the person of Christ.

¹⁰³The Nicene Creed, the Apostle's Creed, and the Lausanne Covenant vary in their expansiveness but each affirms core evangelical Christological convictions such as the deity of Jesus, Jesus' position in the Trinity, the substitutionary work of Jesus' atonement, and the historicity of Jesus' birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and position at the right hand of the Father. VFC's statement of faith aligns with these convictions and states the following regarding the person and work of Christ, "We believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and mysteriously and wonderfully is God in the flesh. He is the perfect reflection of God's heart, character, beauty and love for people. He lived a sinless life and offered Himself as the only perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross. Through faith in Jesus we have been forgiven and brought into a right relationship with God. Jesus rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven and one day will return to judge the world and bring an end to injustice as He restores all things to God's original intent." "Section Two," *Vintage Faith New Members Course Materials*, 6.

¹⁰⁴The framers of the *Missional Manifesto* include Ed Stetzer, Alan Hirsch, Tim Keller, Dan Kimball, Eric Mason, J.D. Greear, Craig Ott, Linda Berquist, Philip Nation, and Brad Andrews.

¹⁰⁵"Missional Manifesto," *Missional Manifesto* [on-line]; accessed 13 April 2011; available from <http://www.missionalmanifesto.net/index.html>; Internet.

Gospel

D. A. Carson was one of the earlier critics of the ECM. Concerned with the neo-liberal teachings emerging from some of the movement's most prominent leaders, Carson challenged other emerging church leaders to rise up and call to account those who were preaching a distorted and perilous gospel.¹⁰⁶ Carson's challenge was promptly answered in the five perspectives book, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*. Contributor Doug Pagitt offers one of the earliest prolonged articulations of Revisionist theology, claiming that authority should reside supremely in the Holy Spirit and one's community of faith, and not the Scriptures.¹⁰⁷ Unified in their denunciation of what Pagitt calls an "embodied theology," contributors Mark Driscoll, John Burke, and Kimball each expressed serious reservations.¹⁰⁸ This book was the earliest best demonstration of the theological diversity residing within the ECM.

Kimball's contribution in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* represents the first time he publically opposed the teachings of the Revisionist stream. Kimball, separating himself from Pagitt's theology, used the book as an opportunity to communicate his orthodox understanding of the gospel. Kimball refers to himself as a fundamentalist in articulating doctrinal positions on the depravity of man, substitutionary atonement, and the realities of a literal heaven and hell.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 187.

¹⁰⁷Doug Pagitt, "The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 120.

¹⁰⁸Kimball confesses that he would have spoken out more strongly against Pagitt's chapter if he knew the direction Pagitt was taking theologically. Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 225.

¹⁰⁹Kimball, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, 100-02.

How does Kimball understand the gospel? The heart of the gospel for Kimball is encapsulated in the Paul's words to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 15:3-4).¹¹⁰ The core of the good news is found in what Paul claims regarding the work of Jesus, his death, burial, and resurrection. "This is the Jesus-centered gospel," according to Kimball, "that changes and transforms us." Kimball recognizes that not everyone will embrace the radical nature of the gospel, which "entails faith in the risen Jesus (Rom 10:9), the denial of self (Luke 9:23), and repentance to align with God's will (Acts 3:19)." These truths have always and continue to be stumbling blocks for the masses.¹¹¹

The Revisionist stream's rejection and/or questioning of substitutionary atonement is well-documented.¹¹² Kimball, recognizing substitutionary atonement as a central teaching of Jesus' work at Calvary, holds this truth because of Scripture's clarity on the teaching.¹¹³ Responding to Revisionists' questioning of the doctrine, he states,

I cannot read the New Testament and consider it all inspired and then downplay or ignore the repeated teaching about the blood of Jesus being shed on the cross for the payment of our sin. . . . Thinking about blood sacrifices in the Old Testament is not pleasant, and quite frankly, bizarre-sounding to today's mind-set. Thinking about Jesus dying and his blood paying for my sin is also not pleasant, and what Jesus went through is horrifying. But does it clearly teach these events in the Bible? I can't see any option but to hold that as truth. Because Paul wrote Romans using legal terms familiar to that day, it can all sound coldly technical. But by faith, I believe these events are true, and I then rejoice in the salvation that comes from the blood that was shed a payment on the cross.¹¹⁴

Drawing on Scripture and the church's historical understanding of the gospel, Kimball affirms salvation as obtainable only through Jesus' substitutionary work on the cross; and

¹¹⁰Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 237.

¹¹¹Ibid., 238.

¹¹²Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 182-87.

¹¹³Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 100.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

man's eternal restoration is solely a divine act requiring no human work or religious effort.

While the core of the gospel is espoused in 1 Cor 15:3-4, Kimball believes there is more to the gospel than the reductionist form which focuses exclusively on the promise of eternal life in heaven. He calls Christians to have a holistic perspective that incorporates how the gospel impacts people's lives, not just in the afterlife, but in the here and now.¹¹⁵ Christians modeling the life of Christ, according to Kimball, should be involved in creation restoration by fighting oppression, suffering, and the fall's many manifestations in the world.¹¹⁶

Kimball uses two similes to explain his holistic approach to gospel living. First, gospel living is to be like a marriage, not a marriage certificate. Second, gospel living is like a driver's license, not a birth certificate.¹¹⁷ These metaphors are intended to communicate that gospel living does begin at a specific point in time (i.e., conversion); yet, it continues throughout the life of the believer. The gospel is not simply a solitary position of assurance with God. Rather, the gospel is "an invitation into a beautiful relationship with God that gives us the privilege of participating with him in loving others and making a difference on earth," a message Kimball argues, "people today can relate to."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 223-24.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹⁷Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 237. Kimball leans on a work of Scot McKnight, the originator of these descriptions. Scot McKnight, "What is the Gospel," *Next Wave* (December 2005) [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2011; available from <http://www.the-next-wave.info/archives/issue85/index-57618.cfm.html>; Internet.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 238.

Ecclesiology

The majority of emerging church leaders, according to Scot McKnight, hold to a much different vision about what the church is to be and do than their predecessors leading the modern church. McKnight writes, “At its core, the emerging movement is an attempt to fashion a new ecclesiology.”¹¹⁹

John Hammett, in an essay entitled “The Church according to Emergent/Emerging Church,” provides some overarching assessments regarding “emerging ecclesiology.” He contends emerging churches are generally not most concerned with what might be considered the traditional components of ecclesiology, such as the marks of the church, different forms of church government, or different views of the ordinances.¹²⁰ Hammett provides specific examples in writing,

This author’s research has not discovered any significant interest in emerging church material in discussions of congregational versus Presbyterian polity or infant baptism versus believers’ baptism or the nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper or the proper marks of a true church.”¹²¹

Hammett maintains the primary ecclesiological focus of emerging churches is on the church’s nature as community, the church’s missional orientation to the culture, the church’s worship, and the church’s leadership – topics that will be addressed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.¹²² Based on Hammett’s research, it appears the ECM’s shift in ecclesiological focus has attempted to address the perceived weaknesses in the modern church’s ecclesiology (e.g., the church’s nature as community and missional orientation

¹¹⁹McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.”

¹²⁰John Hammett, “The Church according to Emergent/Emerging Church,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway(Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 224-25.

¹²¹Ibid., 224.

¹²²Ibid., 224-25.

to the culture). Unfortunately, the ECM's shift may have resulted in the neglect of other significant ecclesiological components (e.g., theology of the ordinances, church polity, church membership).

Traditional components of ecclesiology, as defined by Hammett, are largely absent from Kimball's writings. The times Kimball does address them he often avoids specificity and speaks in generalities. For example, in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, he writes,

I believe true emerging churches must go deep within, and from the inside out, rethink, reshape, and revalue how we go about everything as culture changes. We must rethink leadership, church structure, the role of the pastor, spiritual formation, how community is lived out, how evangelism is done, how we express our worship, etc.¹²³

What does Kimball mean by rethinking, reshaping, and revaluing? The reader is left unsure because Kimball does not expound further on how these reforms are manifested in emerging churches.

Ministry in emerging culture requires churches to reconsider aspects of ecclesiology; however, it seems unwise for Kimball to claim that "everything" regarding "our local ecclesiological expression and ethos" must be brought in question.¹²⁴ If culture does impact "everything," is that to say, for example, culture should influence how churches interpret and implement Jesus' instructions regarding church discipline? Kimball says no, but his lax use of language leaves readers guessing.¹²⁵ Emerging

¹²³Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 86.

¹²⁴Ibid. An indicator that a young Kimball lacked a robust theology of the church was in identifying the Graceland Young Adult Ministry at SCBC as a "church-within-a-church." This concept, which proved to be pragmatically ineffective, raises serious theological problems.

¹²⁵Kimball, email to author, 22 July 2011.

culture's cynical disposition towards "organized religion" does partially account for why Kimball does not commit attention in his writings to what Hammett considers to be more traditional components of ecclesiology (e.g., church polity, church membership, church discipline). Hammett's assessment of emerging ecclesiology, emphasizing some components while deemphasizing others, is present in Kimball's writings.

Despite underdeveloped aspects of ecclesiology in Kimball's writings, the same cannot be said for his ministry at VFC. VFC holds strong convictions regarding church membership, church polity, church discipline, and theology of the ordinances.

Requirements for membership include baptism by immersion, attendance to a new member class, and a verbal commitment to a membership covenant.¹²⁶ Thom Rainer, in *High Expectations*, identifies a high correlation between a church's membership expectations and church health.¹²⁷ Rainer's research reveals the majority of effective evangelistic churches require the following for membership: baptism, commitment to a doctrinal statement, and participation in a new member's class.¹²⁸ These churches also place a high expectation of attendance to a small group. VFC places these same requirements and expectations on its members, although VFC's emphasis is on corporate

¹²⁶As listed throughout the six sections of VFC's new members materials, VFC's commitment to members includes the following examples: praying for members, providing opportunities for spiritual development, leading members in biblically thoughtful worship, protecting the church body through church discipline, supporting to development of strong marriages and families, equipping members to live as missionaries, promising to teach historical Christian orthodoxy, and committing to humbly balance biblical orthodoxy with biblical orthopraxy. Member's commitment to VFC includes the following examples: living a life marked by the Holy Spirit, practicing a pattern of regular participation in worship gatherings, promising to give to VFC sacrificially and proportionately, embracing the beliefs of VFC, using spiritual gifts, praying for VFC, committing to be a gospel witness, and taking responsibility for one's own theological growth.

¹²⁷Thom Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret to Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 1999).

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 49-65.

worship participation rather than small group. It appears that Kimball, as illustrated through the ministry at VFC, holds to a robust view of church membership.

Hammett, examining the landscape of emerging churches, maintains that most adopt a polity that resembles a congregational-led government – a model he claims best aligns with emerging generations who hold “a strong opposition to any form of authoritarian or hierarchical leadership.”¹²⁹ Hammett references Kimball’s writings specifically to bolster this claim. Addressing emerging churches’ propensity to lead as a body, he writes, “Dan Kimball expresses a similar idea, saying that emerging church leaders need to see themselves as spiritual guides or fellow journeyers, who approach their role with the thought, ‘I’ll lead as we solve this together.’”¹³⁰

Despite Kimball’s proclivity towards empowering others and desire to “diffuse power,” he does not advocate a congregational-led model.¹³¹ Kimball endorses a plural-elder-led model, and such is reflected in VFC.¹³² The Leadership Council of VFC, comprised of eight elders, acts as the governing body of the church. Of the eight elders, five are lay members and three are paid staff members. The Leadership Council has ultimate responsibility for setting the biblical doctrines for the church, casting vision,

¹²⁹Hammett, “The Church according to Emergent/Emerging Church,” 251-52. Collaborating this assertion, Hammett draws from the research of Gibbs and Bolger who argue that one of the nine identifying characteristics of emerging churches is that they “lead as a body.” Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 45.

¹³⁰Hammett, “The Church according to Emergent/Emerging Church,” 252. Hammett is quoting Kimball from *The Emerging Church*, 229.

¹³¹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 229.

¹³²Kimball, email, 22 July 2011. VFC’s website, describing its church structure, states that VFC’s “leadership structure is designed to match the complexities of a larger faith community and reflect the specific context and mission we have, while at the same time remain faithful to what the Bible teaches regarding leadership in the church.” “About Leadership at Vintage Faith Church,” *Vintage Faith* [on-line]; accessed 3 March 2010; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/leadership>; Internet.

hiring and firing pastoral staff, approving budgets, overseeing church discipline, and guarding the overall health of the church.¹³³

VFC leadership materials provide a qualifying statement in delineating the differentiating roles of the Leadership Council and VFC pastoral staff.

There is a functional distinction between the role of the Leadership Council and VFC staff. There may be overlap at times because of relationship and dialogue and Leadership Council being involved on various ministry teams. But the primary and general distinctions between Leadership Council and staff are: The Leadership Council determines and lovingly guards the doctrines and vision for the church. The staff are the ones who own the responsibility of figuring out and implementing the accomplishment of the vision the Leadership Council sets.¹³⁴

VFC's Leadership Council consists of multiple staff members in order to bring a more balanced staff-perspective to the council and to inhibit any one staff member from gaining "too much power and control."¹³⁵

VFC's plural-elder-led government is commonly found within evangelicalism, particularly in Reformed churches and Baptists churches who view the plural-elder-led model to be a form of congregationalism.¹³⁶ Phil Newton, in *Elders in Congregational Life*, argues that a plurality of elders in a congregational setting is not only the most biblical model; it is also a highly functional model in that it avoids the "unwieldy and unworkable" nature of pure congregationalism.¹³⁷

¹³³"Leadership Council and Staff Roles," *Vintage Faith Church Leadership Materials*, 1-2.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁵Kimball, email, 22 July 2011.

¹³⁶See Chad Brand and R. Stanton Norman, "Introduction: Is Polity that Important?," in *Perspectives on Church Government: 5 Views on Church Polity*, ed. Chad Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2005), 21.

¹³⁷Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), backcover.

Church discipline is not addressed in Kimball’s writings, but he does view it as an important element in maintaining a healthy, biblical church. Demonstrating the importance of church discipline, VFC includes in its membership covenant that the church will practice church discipline through “lovingly addressing sin issues” in order “to protect [the] church body” as mandated by Scripture.¹³⁸ VFC’s ministry volunteer application also references the necessity of church discipline in order to provide appropriate accountability.¹³⁹ Kimball says that VFC has entered into the church discipline process on numerous occasions for both doctrinal and lifestyle issues. Fortunately, none of these instances has resulted in excommunication.¹⁴⁰

Kimball holds to a Baptist view of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.¹⁴¹ VFC’s doctrinal beliefs regarding the ordinances are addressed in VFC’s new member materials. Regarding baptism, it reads,

In Romans 6:1-11, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under water pictures Christ’s death. Coming out of the water illustrates his resurrection. Immersion follows the biblical pattern of baptism, as baptism occurred through the immersion of a person completely under water and then raising him up (Mark 1:5, 10; John 3:23) to show that he was united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-7; Colossians 2:11-12). Jesus himself was baptized in a river. Baptism is to be done in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). Baptism does not save anyone, but it is an outward sign of something God has done in someone (Galatians 1:10, 5:4; Ephesians 2:8-9).¹⁴²

¹³⁸In Scriptural support of church discipline, the materials reference Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; Gal 6:1; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-5. Section Four: Community,” *Vintage Faith Church New Members Class Materials*, 8.

¹³⁹“Ministry Volunteer Application,” *Vintage Faith Leadership Materials*.

¹⁴⁰Kimball, email, 22 July 2011.

¹⁴¹Dan Kimball, email to author, 5 July 2011.

¹⁴²“Section Six: Theology,” 10-11.

VFC's adherence to a Baptist understanding of believer's baptism aligns with evangelical theology. VFC performs baptisms quarterly.¹⁴³

Kimball also holds to a Baptist view of the Lord's Supper. The new member materials read,

Jesus, at the Last Supper, instituted Communion as a means by which God's people could continually remember and celebrate His body (shown in the bread) and His blood (shown in the wine) shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-29). The final communion for God's people will be at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb with Jesus at the end of history in His Kingdom (Revelation 19:9). The church is to celebrate communion with a sober confession of sin and recognition of why Jesus died and rose (1 Corinthians 11:17-34) and partake together to show that they are unified by Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:17).¹⁴⁴

VFC's Baptist-memorial view of the Lord's Supper aligns with evangelical theology.

VFC partakes of the Lord's Supper once a month.

Some leaders in the ECM, like Tony Jones, view the American church model as antiquated and are calling for its complete deconstruction.¹⁴⁵ Not surprising is that Jones endorsed Pete Ward's *Liquid Church*, which calls for a new form of church that "does not exist yet."¹⁴⁶ *Liquid Church* "is an attempt to imagine rather than describe a different way of being church."¹⁴⁷ Kimball, however, is not calling for church models to

¹⁴³VFC's building was originally occupied by a Presbyterian church; therefore, the church uses a portable baptistery.

¹⁴⁴"Section Six: Theology," 11-12.

¹⁴⁵Tony Jones compares the modern church to pay phones, in that both are becoming obsolete. He writes, "We may now be hearing the American church's death rattle (at least the death of church-as-we-know-it)." Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁴⁶Pete Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission – A Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2002), introduction. "Celebrification," *Theology: The Tony Jones Blog* (22 March 2011) [on-line]; accessed 13 July 2011; available from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2011/03/22/celebrification/>; Internet.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

be either deconstructed or created. He calls for churches to return to what he believes Jesus intended them to be.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The primary objective of this chapter was to survey Kimball's theology for the purpose of verifying whether or not his ministry is rooted in historical Christian orthodoxy. Considerable evaluation reveals that Kimball's core doctrinal beliefs are evangelical. Secondly, this chapter demonstrates Kimball's theological reputation among evangelicals appears to be improving. Concerns once circulating around Kimball's theological credibility appear to be dissipating, indicating that his capacity to influence evangelicals in the future may expand.

An inherent danger of evaluating the doctrinal convictions of a living subject is that theological shifts are still a possibility. Having acknowledged this peril, one can feel confident claiming Kimball's theology is evangelical.

¹⁴⁸Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 227-28.

CHAPTER 4

AN EXPLORATION OF DAN KIMBALL'S METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The thesis of this dissertation is that Dan Kimball's ministry is a model for effective ministry to emerging generations. Chapter 3 established that Kimball's theology is evangelical. Attention now shifts to the methodology he uses to evangelize, disciple, and minister to emerging generations. This dissertation argues that Kimball's methodology provides insights for reaching those in emerging culture. A survey of his methodological framework is essential for this premise to be substantiated. A critical analysis of Kimball's methodology is provided in Chapter 5.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section one explores several of the overarching principles to guide Kimball's approach to methodology. Sections two through five explore Kimball's methodological approaches to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching.

A Methodology for Emerging Generational Ministry

At the core of the ECM is a protest. *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*, a collection of essays from emerging church leaders, provides a prime example of the movement's unhappiness – for protest is a major theme in all

fifteen chapters.¹ The protest of the ECM is multi-faceted, evidenced by Carson's treatment of the issue in *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*.² Carson's research reveals that emerging church leaders, most of who "have come from conservative, traditional, evangelical churches," are reacting against the modern church's perceived weaknesses.³ Carson, drawing from the writings of Spencer Burke, identifies three examples of the protest in stating that emerging churches are reacting to the modern church's propensity to elevate senior pastors to a status of CEO, to avoid "messy ministry" to society's disenfranchised, and to promote a "spiritual Darwinism" where bigger is always better.⁴

The origins of the protest, as Dave Tomlinson correctly identifies, is primarily rooted in culture.⁵ Tomlinson points out that emerging generations, or what he refers to as "post-evangelicals," are shaped by a different culture from that which shaped evangelicalism. Whereas evangelicals think of their faith in terms of a modern culture, emerging generations think of their faith in terms of a postmodern culture.

¹Editor Mike Yaconelli uses provocative language in communicating his disappointment with the modern evangelical church, "I realized the modern-institutional-denominational church was permeated by values that are contradictory to the Church of Scripture. The very secular humanism the institutional church criticized pervaded the church structure, language, methodology, process, priorities, values, and vision. The 'legitimate' church, the one that had convinced me of my illegitimacy, was becoming the illegitimate church, fully embracing the values of modernity." Mike Yaconelli, "The Illegitimate Church," in *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*, ed. Mike Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003), 16.

²D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 14-41.

³Ibid., 14.

⁴Ibid., 14-18. Carson finds basis for this list of protests from Spencer Burke's essay "From the Third Floor to the Garage," in *Stories of Emergence*, ed. Mike Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/EmergentYS, 2003), 27-39.

⁵Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2003).

Rising up out of modernity and its values was the seeker-sensitive church. The seeker-sensitive approach, according to Kimball, is a particular methodology or style of ministry designed to attract those who feel the church is irrelevant or dull.⁶ Kimball acknowledges some value in the seeker-sensitive model for its ability to reintroduce church as relevant and contemporary to those individuals modernity influenced. He also believes the church is at a point in its history where the presuppositions undergirding church ministry need to be re-examined.⁷ Just as a wave of change came to the modern church with the seeker-sensitive movement, a new wave of change is now breaking on the shores of the postmodern church.

Kimball's ministry approach is a reaction to and a protest against modern ministry approaches, which the seeker-sensitive movement is now considered according to Carson.⁸ Kimball's ministry, shaped by this new wave of cultural change, is geared toward reaching the emerging generations, or what he also calls the "post-seeker-sensitive" generation.⁹ Emerging generations, according to Kimball, represent the first generation to have grown up in a post-Christian America. As a result, their

⁶As previously stated, Kimball does not use "seeker-driven" terminology. However, his use of the term "seeker-sensitive" is often more accurately described as "seeker-driven." Further describing what is the "seeker-driven" approach, Kimball writes, "This often involves removing what could be considered religious stumbling blocks and displays of the spiritual (such as extended worship, religious symbols, extensive prayer times, liturgy, etc.) so that seekers can relate to the environment and be transformed by the message of Jesus." Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 25.

⁷Ibid., 25-26.

⁸Carson denotes that despite Kimball's critical assessment of the seeker-sensitive movement in *The Emerging Church*, several pastors in that tradition give Kimball's writing high praise. John Ortberg, formerly of Willow Creek, and Rick Warren of Saddleback both endorse *The Emerging Church*. Warren also wrote the foreword. Their charity, claims Carson, is most likely given because Kimball casts his work, in part, as an alternative model for reaching emerging generations who appear less receptive to the seeker-sensitive approach. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 36.

⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 26.

presuppositions about life and faith are not rooted in a Judeo-Christian worldview.¹⁰

Ironically, many of the very practices that the modern church removed from the church attract emerging generations (e.g., religious symbolism, extended worship and prayer time, liturgy).¹¹ Emerging generations possess a different set of values than their modern predecessors. Kimball uses the following terms in describing what emerging generations embrace: pluralism, experiential, mystical, narrative, fluid, global, and communal.¹² Due to this cultural shift, Kimball believes implications exist for the local church.

Kimball calls for churches to adopt a culturally sensitive methodological approach to their evangelism, discipleship, worship, preaching, and other practices. This approach is characterized by two distinguishing marks. First, it is theologically grounded. Second, it is open to cultural contextualization.

First, and foremost, this approach anchors methodology in theology, not vice versa. Churches must continually examine their practices, always striving to ground them in Scripture.¹³ Kimball aims to do that which Scripture commands while avoiding that which Scripture forbids.

¹⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 58-59.

¹¹Kimball believes post-seeker-sensitive generations are drawn to a historical form of “vintage” Christianity. “A post-seeker-sensitive worship gathering promotes, rather than hides, full displays of spirituality (extended worship, religious symbols, liturgy, extensive prayer times, extensive use of Scripture and readings, etc.) so that people can experience and be transformed by the message of Jesus. This approach is done, however, with renewed life and is still ‘sensitive’ as clear instruction and regular explanation are given to help seekers understand theological terms and spiritual exercises.” Ibid., 26.

¹²Kimball states that “emerging generations are being born into an increasingly postmodern atmosphere and soil.” Describing the changes between the modern and post-Christian eras, Kimball lists eight examples of shifting beliefs/values. They include: monotheism to religious pluralism, rational thinking to experientially influenced, religious spirituality to mystical spirituality, propositional to narrative, systematic theology and practices to fluid theology and practices, local focus to global focus, individualistic focus to communal focus, truth to preference. Ibid., 60-61.

¹³Dan Kimball, “Humble Theology: Re-exploring Doctrine While Holding on to Truth,” *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 222.

Second, this approach understands contextualization as a biblical principle, finding its essence in the apostle Paul's words "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:23). This approach promotes a methodology that is flexible for the purposes of effective ministry to a specific culture. An example is Kimball's approach to evangelism, "Like missionaries respectfully entering a foreign culture, we need to approach our post-Christian culture with a gentle awareness of the prevailing worldview while boldly expressing the great news of Jesus and God's truth."¹⁴ Appropriate contextualization, avoiding the pitfall of unbiblical capitulation to culture's demands, is Kimball's objective.

In summation, Kimball's methodological approach seeks to be both theologically grounded and culturally relevant. The sections following will examine this methodological approach's impact on Kimball's approach to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching. These sections will explore the primary principles which undergird his approach to these four areas of ministry. Attention will also be given to how Kimball's methodological approach is manifested in the ministry at Vintage Faith Church. A critique of Kimball's methodology will be reserved until chapter 5.

Kimball's Approach to Evangelism

The ECM, according to Kimball, began as a missional movement focused on discovering innovative strategies for reaching emerging generations.¹⁵ It is for this reason Kimball entered into the "emerging conversation." Kimball is genuinely passionate about evangelism. He is personally committed to missional living and cultivating a missional-

¹⁴Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 76.

¹⁵Dan Kimball, email to author, 12 April 2011. Carson also claims the movement was largely driven by a concern for evangelism. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 52.

mindset in others through his ministry.¹⁶ One could argue that no emerging church leader's ministry has been more influential in shaping the movement's approach to evangelism than Kimball's.

Kimball's approach to evangelism calls for a significant shift from the evangelistic strategies popularized by the modern church. Kimball highlights in *The Emerging Church* eight examples of the shifting values distinguishing the modern church from the emerging church.¹⁷ Kimball admittedly employs "some hyperbole" in his comparisons.¹⁸ These value comparisons, while no doubt reductionistic and exaggeratory, communicate the types of reforms emerging church leaders are implementing within their churches. They are as follows:

1. To the modern church, evangelism is an event that you invite people to. To the emerging church, evangelism is a process that occurs through relationship, trust, and example.
2. To the modern church, evangelism is primarily concerned with getting people into heaven. To the emerging church, evangelism is concerned with people's experiencing the reality of living under the reign of his kingdom now.
3. To the modern church, evangelism is focused on pre-Christians.¹⁹ To the emerging church, evangelism is focused on post-Christians.²⁰
4. To the modern church, evangelism is done by evangelists. To the emerging church, evangelism is done by disciples.

¹⁶Kimball was one of the ten framers of the *Missional Manifesto*, released in April 2011.

¹⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 201.

¹⁸This list is quoted from *ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹Pre-Christians, possessing a Judeo-Christian worldview, "do not have a clear understanding of Christianity, but with the right approach could be convinced of its validity." *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁰Post-Christians, most likely not possessing a Judeo-Christian worldview, "have already encountered Christianity at some level and have decided on the answer, 'Thanks, but no thanks.' In other words, you are starting in a very deep hole. This makes our strategy of evangelism a whole lot more different for post-Christians since it means we are starting in an extremely more difficult place than with generations past." *Ibid.*

5. To the modern church, evangelism is something you do in addition to discipleship. To the emerging church, evangelism is part of being a disciple.
6. To the modern church, evangelism is a message. To the emerging church, evangelism is a conversation.
7. To the modern church, evangelism uses reason and proofs for apologetics. To the emerging church, evangelism uses the church being the church as the primary apologetic.
8. To the modern church, missions is a department of the church. To emerging churches, the church is a mission.

With these shifting values in mind, Kimball articulates six primary principles that govern his approach to evangelism. First, evangelism offers an invitation into the kingdom instead of a way to get to heaven.²¹ The modern church, according to Kimball, promoted a gospel that “focused only on the problem of fixing sin (which absolutely needs fixing) through the death and resurrection of Christ” so heaven can be achieved and hell avoided.²² Kimball seeks to correct this reductionistic understanding by highlighting the importance of daily orthopraxy.

The gospel message of emerging churches, according to Kimball, teaches “Jesus died for your sins so that you can be his redeemed coworker now in what he is doing in this world and can spend eternity with the one you are giving your life to in heaven when you die.”²³ This more holistic understanding of the gospel has propelled emerging churches to be heavily involved in mercy ministries. VFC is committed to mercy ministries on several fronts. One example is the “Skate and Rock” event, which is

²¹Ibid., 203.

²²Ibid., 202.

²³Ibid.

an annual food-drive benefit where the sport of skateboarding is used as a medium to collect food and raise money to feed the impoverished population in Santa Cruz.²⁴

Kimball is encouraged to see the growing number of evangelical churches awakening to the need of social justice: “New generations are not simply seeing justice as something extra to do as a Christian, like an annual trip to build a home in Mexico, but instead as a fabric of the Gospel itself and an incredibly important part of what it means to be a Christian.”²⁵ Yet, Kimball is concerned that the proverbial pendulum may be swinging too far in the direction of social justice ministry. His continuous interaction with younger Christians is revealing a disturbing trend where more are defining the gospel as participating in social justice ministries than the cross.²⁶ Kimball’s hope is to lead Christians to adopt a multifaceted, holistic gospel that minimizes neither evangelism nor cultural responsibilities. Kimball, recognizing the inherent dangers of shifts, exhorts churches to find the biblically-appropriate balance when filling the cultural and evangelistic mandates.²⁷

Second, evangelism is less an invitation to an event and more an invitation to enter into community.²⁸ The seeker-sensitive church, ministering to predominantly modernistic individuals, experienced considerable success in the 1980s and 1990s gearing their evangelism strategies around large outreach events. This strategy, as

²⁴Danny Keith, “Skate and Rock at Vintage Faith Church Grinds Out Hunger,” *Santa Cruz Patch* (8 May 2011) [on-line]; accessed 3 June 2011; available from http://santacruz.patch.com/articles/skate-and-rock-at-vintage-faith-church-grinds-out-hunger#youtube_video-5976456; Internet.

²⁵Dan Kimball, “Justice Needs Evangelism,” *Outreach*, September/October 2010, 24.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Kimball, “Justice Needs Evangelism.”

²⁸Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 204.

Kimball experienced at SCBC, did not translate in emerging culture. Emerging generations, being less interested in event productions, are more likely to join a community of faith before following Christ.²⁹ Emerging churches strive to create an intimate, non-threatening environment where unbelievers can enter into the community of faith. It is within the context of Christian community that unbelievers experience the church, receive ministry through the church, and come to faith.

Kimball points to George Hunter's work in offering an approach to contemporary evangelism:³⁰

1. You first establish community with people or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith.
2. Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship.
3. In time, as they discover what you believe, you invite them to commit.

This approach to evangelism is dependent upon Christians adopting an incarnational lifestyle, a lifestyle committed to building relationships with unbelievers outside and inside the church building. The church's primary form of evangelism, according to Kimball, will be the church simply being what the church should be.³¹

In an effort to foster the idea of inviting unbelievers into community, VFC established the Abbey Coffee, Art, and Music Lounge. The Abbey was created with the hopes of dismantling Christian stereotypes hindering gospel ministry in Santa Cruz. It was also to be a venue for VFC members to develop relationships with unbelievers. The Abbey has gained significant popularity in Santa Cruz since its opening in 2009. It has

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰This list is quoted from *ibid.*, 204-05. Kimball references George Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 53-54.

³¹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 205.

been featured several times in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* and received three “Best of Santa Cruz” awards in 2010.³² The Abbey serves an example of how emerging churches are moving away from event-based evangelism to community-based evangelism.

Third, evangelism is more dialogue and listening than preaching and telling.³³ Effective evangelism to emerging generations, claims Kimball, requires relationship, dialogue, and a testimony established through living out genuine faith. Reinforcing this principle, Kimball draws on the expertise of George Barna. Barna, speaking on how to reach contemporary culture, writes, “A Socratic form of evangelism – questions-based rather than didactic; long-term rather than hit-and-run; conversational rather than confrontational; backed up by personal modeling rather than institutional traditions and dogma – works best.”³⁴

Although Kimball believes evangelism sometimes requires confrontation, he agrees with Barna’s approach that emphasizes meaningful dialogue with emerging generations. VFC attempts to equip its members to engage unbelievers in meaningful dialogue by training them to be theologians who understand their cultural context. VFC’s new members’ material contains a section titled “Christians Need to Know the Teachings of Jesus and the Bible in Order to be Missional.” The section challenges members to

³²The original articles in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* has been removed from the newspaper’s website; however, they can still be found through Kimball’s blog at “The Abbey in the Newspaper Again,” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (January 2011) [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2011; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2011/01/the-abbey-in-the-newspaper-again.html; Internet. Dan Kimball, “Fun News about the Abbey,” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (April 2010) [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2011; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2010/04/fun-news-about-the-abbeycoffee-music-and-art-lounge.html; Internet.

³³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 206.

³⁴George Barna, “Seven Questions with George Barna,” *GinkWorld.Net* [on-line], accessed 3 March 2009, available from http://www.ginkworld.net/current_7q/archives_7q_2002/7_questions_04012002.htm; Internet

“strive to be serious students of Scripture” in order to effectively communicate God’s truths within culture.³⁵ In summation, gospel proclamation from the pulpit is still important and necessary; however, gospel proclamation incorporating dialogue is a more agreeable medium of communication to emerging generations.

Fourth, evangelism is part of discipleship and the church culture rather than something “you do on the side.”³⁶ Kimball believes evangelism is an essential practice for the Christian, and ingraining this notion in new believers is critical. Kimball maintains that the practice of evangelism should be part of the believer’s DNA. Evangelism is also an expectation for all Christians; it is not the task of a few individuals gifted in the skill of gospel proclamation.³⁷

Kimball, wary of churches relegating missions to a specific ministry or department, believes evangelism and missions should permeate all of church life. He states, “Just the fact that a church has a missions department can signal that the real mission field is ‘way over there someplace,’ rather than also being all around us.”³⁸ Kimball, who oversees VFC’s missional aspects of ministry, promotes a church culture where both individual members and the specific ministries of the church are expected to be missionally focused. This emphasis, according to Kimball, helps combat the flawed ideology that evangelism and missions are to be relegated to particular individuals or ministry.

³⁵“Section Six: Theologians,” *Vintage Faith New Members Course Materials*, 3.

³⁶Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 207.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

VFC's missions ministry is divided into two teams – a Global Team and a Justice and Compassion Team. The Global Team oversees domestic and international missions and currently aids the church in maintaining partnerships in Mexico, China, and Uganda.³⁹ The Justice and Compassion Team oversee local missions projects, such as the “Skate and Rock” event and various servant evangelism projects.⁴⁰

Fifth, evangelism is “discipleship-evangelism” rather than entertainment-based.⁴¹ This point primarily refers to the church's approach to worship gatherings. Entertainment is not what attracts emerging generations; they crave spiritual meaning. Kimball believes churches should not hide Jesus behind strobe lights and loud music as if ashamed. Churches need to introduce unbelievers to the rich spirituality of Christianity. The seeker-driven church, according to Kimball, is identified for its de-emphasis on those teachings and practices perceived as offensive to unbelievers.⁴² Conversely, emerging churches “respect the intelligence of nonbelievers” by seeking to be “bold and loving” in living out a transparent faith.⁴³ Transparency communicates authenticity, a quality emerging generations value.

Sixth, evangelism today may take more time and trust-building. Emerging generations in large part do not hold to a Judeo-Christian worldview. Their difference in worldview presents innate challenges to their evangelization. Kimball writes,

³⁹For more information see “Global Team,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 24 July 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/globalteam>; Internet.

⁴⁰For more information on local missions, see “Local Justice and Compassion Ministries,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 24 July 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/justiceandcompassion>; Internet.

⁴¹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 207-08.

⁴²Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 25.

⁴³*Ibid.*

In past generations, when a non-Christian converted, they generally already had a biblical worldview. Their sexuality, their view of God, their sense of right and wrong were in line with the teachings of Jesus. But with emerging generations, many times we are dealing with a total change of their concept of God, morals, sexuality, and so on.⁴⁴

Kimball believes these differences will likely result in a conversion and sanctification process that is messier and slower moving.

Not only is there a “worldview” barrier for emerging generations to cross to get to Christianity, but there is also a “reputation” barrier.⁴⁵ Kimball affirms 1 Cor 1:23, which states that the cross is a stumbling block for the unbeliever. However, Kimball points out that many today “stumble on the attitudes of some Christians and on the Christian subculture that we have put in their way before they can even get to the cross.”⁴⁶ He calls Christians to take intentional steps to build trust. He writes,

We need to bridge this chasm of the Christian subculture by befriending people outside the church, inviting them to participate in community, and dialoguing with them. We need to be the light of Jesus and the living gospel to them, building their trust in us so that they will be ready to listen.⁴⁷

VFC is striving to improve the church’s reputation among the people of Santa Cruz.

Their strategy for improvement includes the continual call for VFC’s members to live

⁴⁴Ibid., 208.

⁴⁵Kimball’s *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* articulates the reasons emerging generations possess a poor perception of the church. Kimball uses this book to communicate the anecdotal research he has gathered over the past two decades. Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). *unChristian*, a book which mirrors many of the assertions established in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, provides statistical analysis in supporting many of Kimball’s claims. The authors of *unChristian* write, “Christians are supposed to represent Christ to the world. But according to the latest report card, something has gone terribly wrong. Using descriptions like ‘hypocritical,’ ‘insensitive,’ and ‘judgmental,’ young Americans share an impression of Christians that’s nothing short of... unChristian. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), back cover. Kimball is one of many Christian leaders who provide commentary throughout *unChristian*. Kimball finds agreement with Kinnaman and Lyons’ analysis.

⁴⁶Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 233.

⁴⁷Ibid., 236.

missional Christ-centered lives and for the church to continue its involvement in servant evangelism projects and social justice ministry.⁴⁸

Kimball's Approach to Discipleship

Kimball's passion for evangelism naturally extends into discipleship because "evangelism includes making disciples."⁴⁹ Kimball believes that the ultimate goal of discipleship, no matter the methodological approach used, should be measured by what Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40. First, discipleship should lead believers to love God more. Second, discipleship should lead believers to love people more. Kimball believes it is by these two criteria that discipleship models should be judged.⁵⁰

Kimball's approach to spiritual formation, which is his term of preference, calls for a shift from the modern church's discipleship strategies.⁵¹ Kimball highlights

⁴⁸VFC participates in servant evangelism projects such as their annual "Day of Love." "'Day of Love' is a day when VFC members minister to underprivileged women and children by offering brunch, drinks from the Abbey, childcare, haircuts, massages, manicures, family photos, and basic car care." Dan Kimball, "Day of Love at Vintage Faith Church," *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (June 2011) [on-line]; accessed April 12 2011, available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2011/06/day-of-love-at-vintage-faith-church.html; Internet.

⁴⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 214.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Kimball prefers the term "spiritual formation" over "discipleship." Spiritual formation is a term derived from Gal 4:19. His choice in language is a direct result of studying the works of Dallas Willard. Dallas Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy* has influenced Kimball's thinking in the area of spiritual formation. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998). For evidence of Willard's influence on Kimball, see Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 214. Delineating the distinctions between discipleship and spiritual formation, Bill Hull writes, "The characteristics of classic discipleship included one-on-one mentoring, a disciplined program of Bible study, Scripture memorization, and training in witnessing and speaking. The primary weakness of classical discipleship... [is it] didn't address the disciple's inner life as much as it measured performance. The spiritual formation movement recaptured ancient exercises practiced by Jesus... and is the process through which individuals who have received new life take on the character of Jesus Christ by a combination of effort and grace." Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 18-19.

eleven examples of the shifting values distinguishing the modern church from the emerging church. They are as follows:⁵²

1. To the modern church, discipleship is compartmentalized. To the emerging church, discipleship is holistic.
2. To the modern church, systems are set in place for the spiritual journey. To the emerging church, systems are set in place to guide the journey but not to be the journey itself.
3. To the modern church, the vision for small groups is to fill the “empty chair,” develop leadership, and divide groups to reproduce. To the emerging church, small groups provide a place of stability for those who have experienced divided families and instability in their world.
4. To the modern church, the Bible is a book to help solve problems and a means to know God. To the emerging church, the Bible is a compass for direction and a means to experience God.
5. To the modern church, discipleship is an individual experience. To the modern church, discipleship is a communal experience.
6. To the modern church, discipleship is based on modern methodology and helps. To the emerging church, discipleship is based on ancient disciplines.
7. To the modern church, discipleship is knowledge and belief. To the emerging church, discipleship is holistic faith and action.
8. To the modern church, discipleship is education. To the emerging church, discipleship is spiritual formation.
9. To the modern church, being a disciple and evangelism are two distinct things believers do. To the emerging church, being a disciple is being on an evangelistic mission.
10. To the modern church, spiritual formation primarily occurs through presentation and teaching. To the emerging church, spiritual formation primarily occurs through experience and participation.
11. To the modern church, discipleship is something that happens after people attend the worship service. To the emerging church, discipleship is the center of the mission of the church.

⁵²This list is quoted from *ibid.*, 215.

Kimball presents seven governing principles that shape his approach to spiritual formation. First, Christians should rely on the Holy Spirit, not the disciplines themselves, to transform them.⁵³ Kimball claims emerging generations are not interested in a discipleship model that presents a specific set of tasks. This approach is perceived as works-oriented and leading to legalism. Kimball agrees that Scripture memory and working through biblical studies are good and necessary. His concern is that the disciplines themselves will be viewed as the end instead of the means to an end. Sanctification through the Holy Spirit is the goal, not accomplishing a specific set of tasks.⁵⁴

Second, spiritual formation approaches must be shaped with emerging generations in mind. Kimball's approach implements traditional elements of discipleship as well as non-traditional elements tailored specifically to connect with emerging generations. A traditional element of VFC's spiritual formation process is its emphasis on small group ministries. VFC's small group ministry is called Community Groups. A community group consists of six to fifteen people "who meet during the week to experience authentic community and commit to sharing life together, praying for one another, studying the Scriptures, and serving in the local community."⁵⁵ VFC also offers

⁵³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 216.

⁵⁴According to Kimball, emerging generations are more responsive to fluid forms of learning. Articulating this point further Kimball writes, "A numbered, step-by-step prescription for spiritual progress many times can prohibit organic growth. I've struggled to explain to new believers why they had to go through three classes before learning to share the faith. It was the first thing they wanted to learn, because they have so many non-Christian friends! Obviously we need to be well-rounded in our understanding of our faith, our spiritual habits, and our giftedness. But I believe we will continue to find emerging generations resistant to structures which box up something as mysterious and holistic as spiritual growth into a prescribed system." Ibid., 217.

⁵⁵"Connecting Ministries," *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/serve/connecting-ministries>; Internet.

mid-week spiritual formation classes for those seeking deeper discipleship and accountability. VFC is currently offering The Odyssey – “a seven month intensive spiritual formation workshop.”⁵⁶

The non-traditional elements relate more to the philosophy behind and presentation of spiritual formation ministries. Related to philosophy, VFC attempts to breakdown the compartmentalization of disciplines by emphasizing their interconnectedness.⁵⁷ Attempting to interconnect discipleship with evangelism, Community Groups and mid-week classes often contain a component of training and practicing evangelism. A core value of VFC’s spiritual formation philosophy is practice what you learn – a concept modeled in Jesus’ ministry (Matt 10:1-15; Luke 10:1-16).

Relating to presentation, language is altered in order to reflect the values of emerging culture. Kimball writes, “Titles which sound more spiritual as well as classes which encompass depth with an organic approach fit much better in the fluidity of the emerging culture.”⁵⁸ Despite calling for an approach to spiritual formation that includes non-traditional elements, Kimball provides few examples. Further critique on this point is reserved for chapter 5.

Third, intergenerational connectedness is important. Darrin Patrick stated in a series of lectures on the ECM at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri that most

⁵⁶“The Odyssey,” *Vintage Faith Church* [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/theodyssey>; Internet.

⁵⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 216-17.

⁵⁸Ibid. Addressing language that reflects the values of emerging culture, Kimball writes, “Mosaic Church in Los Angeles uses names like River to describe a spiritual formation retreat that ‘is an immersion of your senses, emotions, body and intellect as we quest to explore our connection to God.’ They have another retreat called Snow, which is a ‘quest for forgiveness.’ Cedar Ridge Community Church in Maryland has spiritual formation classes named Soul Findings, Journey, and Kindle.” Ibid.

emerging churches lack older Christians.⁵⁹ This absence of older, mature Christians, according to Patrick, has resulted in a greater appreciation for intergenerational learning in emerging churches. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary has played a key role in shaping Kimball's thinking in this area.⁶⁰

Kimball believes connecting generations is essential because the future of the church has always hinged on the passing of faith from one generation to another. "Despite what some may believe," according to Kimball, "people in emerging generations deeply desire older spiritual mentors who will guide them in their spiritual formation."⁶¹ Responding to this desire, the general practice of VFC's small group ministry is to appoint older Christians as leaders who can pass on their wisdom to the next generation.⁶² Kimball also encourages churches to consider implementing a mentoring program where intergenerational relationships are intentionally formed.⁶³ VFC also promotes a family-based ministry model that helps to connect families and multi-generations while maintaining the benefits of age-graded ministries.⁶⁴

⁵⁹Darrin Patrick, "A Critique of the Emerging Church – Part Two," *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5267/>; Internet.

⁶⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 219-20.

⁶¹Ibid., 220.

⁶²Ibid., 221.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴As VFC has grown in size, it has transitioned from a family-integrated ministry model to a family-based ministry model. Family-integrated ministry model describes churches whose ministries are primarily intergenerational. Churches adopting this model generally do not have age-graded ministries for children, youth, and adults. Family-based ministry model describes churches whose ministries are organized according to ages and interests while developing intentional activities and training events to bring families together. For further articulation on these family ministry models, see Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views* (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2009).

Fourth, spiritual formation is not a one-size-fits-all approach.⁶⁵ Kimball is wary of the modern church's approach to discipleship, fearful it has systemized discipleship so neatly that all mystery and diversity are lost. Spiritual formation, according to Kimball, is more than creating cookie-cutter Christians who fill in the same blanks, memorize the same verses, and work through the same booklets.⁶⁶ Adding balance to his critique of the modern church's approach, he agrees that some believers thrive in this type of system.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, approaches that emphasize uniformity are often detrimental to the spiritual formation of emerging generations.

Kimball calls for a fluid and diversified approach that understands that people relate to God differently and learn differently. He states,

Some people, for instance, tend to be more sensory. They're drawn to the liturgical, the visual, the majestic. Trying to force people with this temperament to become disciples primarily through cognitive, rational training will only frustrate them. Conversely, if someone's spiritual temperament is more intellectual, they will grow naturally through a study of facts and logic. This is a simple concept, but it has huge ramification for the emerging church.⁶⁸

Kimball's desire to create a discipleship approach that effectively ministers to a wide swath of individuals is reflective in VFC's multi-sensory approach to worship, a subject to be addressed later in this chapter.

Fifth, spiritual formation involves developing spiritual self-feeders, not just spiritual consumers.⁶⁹ Spiritual consumers are the result of an unhealthy discipleship

⁶⁵Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 221.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 222.

⁶⁹Ibid.

approach in which churches feed their members spiritual food but neglect to teach them how to feed themselves. The church, according to Kimball, has a responsibility to do both. Tracing the root of the problem, Kimball writes, “As the modern church has gotten bigger and more proficient in preaching, we have subtly taught people that they come to church to get their weekly fill-up. And so in our eagerness to see disciples made, we create consumers.”⁷⁰

Developing self-feeders finds biblical basis in Heb 5:12-14 which challenges Christians to train themselves to move past spiritual milk and the elementary truths of God’s Word to solid food.⁷¹ Articulating the point further, VFC’s new member material contains a Chinese proverb: “Give a man or woman a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a man or woman to fish and you feed them for a lifetime.”⁷² Endeavoring to develop spiritual self-feeders, VFC emphasizes spiritual formation outside the worship gatherings. VFC members are, for example, encouraged to study through selected devotional studies, books, and commentaries during their daily personal study.⁷³ In summation, Kimball desires to avoid developing Christians who are dependent upon others for spiritual nourishment.

Sixth, spiritual formation emphasizes the practice of ancient disciplines.⁷⁴ Dallas Willard, a leader in the spiritual formation movement, has influenced Kimball’s

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²“Section Six: Theologians,” 4.

⁷³The new member material addresses this point stating, “When we study Scripture interactively, looking up things in biblical commentaries and taking the time to really grasp what Scripture says – we will gain far more understanding of the Scriptures than only sitting and listening to someone else teach (though receiving teaching is also important). Ibid.

views of spiritual formation, particularly in this area.⁷⁵ Kimball asserts that the modern church has limited the spectrum of spiritual disciplines prescribed in Scripture – focusing on the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, giving, and serving, to the neglect of fasting, practicing silence, and *lectio divina*.⁷⁶ Kimball writes, “Emerging generations, in their search for proven, ancient, authentic forms of connection with God, are very much attracted to these ancient disciplines and historical spiritual rituals.”⁷⁷ VFC incorporates times of meditation and silence in its worship gatherings. VFC also encourages small groups to participate in times of fasting.⁷⁸

Seventh, spiritual formation involves participating in mercy ministries. “Beyond the inward process of spiritual formation,” Kimball writes, “our faith also includes kingdom living, part of which is the responsibility to fight locally and globally for social justice on behalf of the poor and needy.”⁷⁹ The Bible is clear that Christians

⁷⁴Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 223.

⁷⁵Joshua Sargent, “The Leadership Blog Interview: Dan Kimball,” *The Leadership Blog* (24 October 2005) [on-line]; accessed 29 July 2011; available from <http://leadershipblog.blogspot.com/2005/10/leadership-blog-interview-dan-kimball.html>; Internet.

⁷⁶Kimball has come under criticism for his endorsement of *lectio divina*, which is Latin for “holy reading.” “Dan Kimball on the Record,” *Apprising Ministries* [on-line], interview conducted by Chris Rosebrough, accessed 15 March 2011; available from <http://apprising.org/2010/11/20/dan-kimball-on-the-record/>; Internet. *Lectio divina*, popularized by Pope Gregory I in the sixth century, is primarily regarded as a Roman Catholic practice where the participant reads a passage a Scripture, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the participant to specific words or phrases in that passage. The participant then begins to mediate on those words or phrases for an extended period of time. The intent is to gain a deeper knowledge of Scripture, God, and oneself. Various understandings and practices of *lectio divina* exist, adding to speculation. *Lectio divina* resembles aspects of worship associated with Eastern mysticism where one seeks an altered state of consciousness through meditative chanting. Kimball, who claimed to be unfamiliar with *lectio divina*'s historical roots and contentious reputation in the interview cited above, states that his understanding of *lectio divina* is as simple as “repeatedly meditating, and praying through a passage of Scripture.” Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 93.

⁷⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 223.

⁷⁸Ibid. Kimball is correct to assert that evangelicals have largely disregarded the discipline of fasting. According to one survey, 80 percent of Protestants do not practice fasting. Thirteen percent of those surveyed said they had fasted twice or more in the past six month. Brad Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2008), 226.

are to be involved in caring for society's oppressed (e.g., Deut 24:21, Jas 1:27, Acts 9:36-42, Luke 14:12-14). Emerging generations, not wishing to surrender such duties or simply give money, desire to be intimately involved in going "into the slums, the homeless shelters, and the nursing homes."⁸⁰ Kimball believes, for emerging churches, social action must be integrated into the church's core values.

These seven components encompass Kimball's holistic spiritual formation model. Kimball, continuing his critical analysis of the modern church, states, "Emerging church leaders need to rethink the whole concept of discipleship, because quite frankly, if we're honest, the modern church hasn't done that good of a job. If making disciples is our primary goal, we'd better not be afraid to reconsider how we go about it."⁸¹ Ultimately, Kimball believes discipleship models should be judged solely on their ability to assist believers in fulfilling Matt 22:37-40 to love God and people more.

Kimball's Approach to Worship

Kimball has been a recognized leader in the area of innovative worship methods since his affiliation with *Leadership Network* in the late 1990s.⁸² He is also regarded as a leading voice in the area of emerging worship.⁸³ Kimball's giftedness as a

⁷⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 224.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Dave Travis, the Managing Director at Leadership Network, acknowledges Kimball as one of the leading innovators in worship methodology in the late 1990s. Due to Kimball's contribution, states Travis, Leadership Network asked him to speak at their forums and conferences. Dave Travis, email to author, 16 March 2011.

⁸³Claiming Kimball as a leading voice in the area of emerging worship is based on two primary criteria. First, he authored *Emerging Worship*, the first book devoted entirely to the subject. Second, he was selected to represent the emerging worship approach to Christian worship in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*. Dan Kimball, "Emerging Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson and Timothy Quill (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 288-333.

musician, preacher, and architect commingle to form his passion for worship and worship design. Claiming to have an outsider's perspective in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*, Kimball says he "did not have any grid from which to view what a 'worship service' should be like. I only knew I wanted to worship God, connect with other Christians, and learn about the Lord Jesus."⁸⁴ The advantage of an outsider's perspective, according to Kimball, is that having no background of the church and its worship culture forced him to form his view of worship from Scripture.

Scriptural examination led Kimball to develop eight principles that act as a parameter to guide his understanding of biblical worship.⁸⁵ He lists these principles in the form of eight questions:

1. Did we lift the name of Jesus up as the centerpiece of why we gathered? (Rev 5:6, 13-14; Col 3:17; Phil 2:9-11)
2. Did we have a time in the Scriptures, learning the story of God and man and inviting and instructing everyone in how we can be part of His story today in kingdom living? (2 Tim 3:14-4:4)
3. Did we pray together and have enough time to slow down and quiet our hearts to hear God's voice and yield to His Spirit? (Acts 1:14; John 4:23-24)
4. Did we experience the joy, love, and encouragement of being together as the church? (Heb 10:25; John 13:34-35)
5. Did we take the Lord's Supper together as a church, whether weekly, monthly, or however we do it? (1 Cor 11:20-32)
6. Did we somehow remind everyone of the mission of the church and why we exist? (Matt 28:18-20)
7. Did we enable people individually to contribute something as part of the body of Christ? (1 Cor 14:26; 12:27)

⁸⁴Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 289.

⁸⁵This list is quoted from *ibid.*, 297-98.

8. Do we see and sense the Spirit of God transforming lives as a result of what we put effort into doing each week?

Related to these eight principles, Kimball maintains that worship services should be designed for the believer, as opposed to the unbeliever.⁸⁶

“Emerging worship” takes these scripturally-grounded guidelines and “then culturally contextualizes them for our emerging culture.”⁸⁷ Emerging worship is not a new concept; in fact, Kimball contends that Christian worship’s “emerging” nature is evidenced through out the Old and New Testaments as illustrated by the differing philosophies and approaches practiced by Abel (Gen 4), Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 13:18), Jacob (Gen 28:22), Malachi (Mal 1:10-11), Jesus (John 4:23-24), and the early Christian converts (Acts 2; 1 Cor 16:19-20; Col 4:15).⁸⁸ Kimball maintains that contextualization of worship continued as the early church developed.

As the church developed and grew and the surrounding culture influenced worship over the next few centuries, the church moved from meeting in homes to larger buildings based on the architecture of the Roman Basilica (the law court). Pews were brought in along with pulpits and choirs. These elements were already common to the Roman and Greek cultures and the pagan religions of the time period.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Further articulating this point, Kimball writes, “A question that was hotly debated with the rise of the seeker-sensitive church is whether the service is for believers or nonbelievers. But this isn’t much of an issue for the emerging church, since in the emerging culture, the things that seeker-sensitive churches removed from their churches are the very things nonbelievers want to experience if they attend a worship service. So I don’t think there will be much controversy about bringing back all the spiritual elements and going deeper with our teaching! Vintage worship gatherings are for believers to fully worship our God and be instructed, equipped, and encouraged, even to a deeper level than ever before. This same very spiritual, experiential worship gathering can be a place where nonbelievers can come and experience God and learn about the practices and beliefs of Christians firsthand.” Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 115.

⁸⁷Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 298. Kimball uses the term “emerging worship” to describe the worship occurring specifically at VFC. The term is not intended to describe how emerging churches in general approach worship.

⁸⁸Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 7-9.

⁸⁹Ibid., 8.

This process of contextualization, according to Kimball, is what the majority of church traditions have continued to do throughout church history.

The music we use, the clothing and pastoral garbs we wear, and even the way we preach are not based on the Bible but on historical forms of communication. I am not saying that culture dictates worship, but what I am saying is that culture shapes how people learn, communicate, and express themselves.⁹⁰

Emerging worship seeks to ascribe to the above stated worship guidelines while honoring the historical expressions of worship that have developed throughout history. Kimball points out the futility of terms such as “traditional” and “contemporary” when describing a style of worship because of their subjectivity.⁹¹

Kimball’s approach to worship, as with evangelism and discipleship, calls for a shift from the worship methodology popularized by the modern church. Kimball highlights twelve examples of the shifting values distinguishing the modern church from the emerging church.⁹² They are as follows:

1. To the modern church, worship “services,” that include preaching, music, programs, etc., are “served” to the attendee. To the emerging church, worship “gatherings” include preaching, music, and other components.
2. To the modern church, services are designed to reach those who have had bad or boring experiences in a church. To the emerging church, gatherings are designed to include and translate to those who have no previous church experience.
3. To the modern church, services are designed to be user-friendly and contemporary. To the emerging church, gatherings are designed to be experiential and spiritual-mystical.
4. To the modern church, there is a need to break the stereotype of what church is. To the emerging church, there is a need to break the stereotype of who Christians are.

⁹⁰Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 298.

⁹¹Ibid., 299.

⁹²This list is quoted from Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 105.

5. To the modern church, stained glass is taken out and replaced with video screens. To the emerging church, stained glass is brought back in on video screens.
6. To the modern church, crosses and other symbols are removed from meeting places to avoid looking too “religious.” In the emerging church, crosses and other symbols are brought back into meeting places to promote a sense of spiritual reverence.
7. To the modern church, rooms are arranged so individuals are able to see the stage from comfortable theater seating while worshiping. To the emerging church, rooms are arranged to focus on community, striving to feel more like a living room or coffeehouse while worshiping.
8. To the modern church, a lit up and cheery sanctuary is valued. To the emerging church, darkness is valued as it displays a sense of spirituality.
9. To the modern church, the focal point of the service is the sermon. To the emerging church, the focal point of the gathering is the holistic experience.
10. To the modern church, the preacher and worship leader lead the service. To the emerging church, the preacher and worship leader lead by participating in the gathering.
11. To the modern church, modern technology is used to communicate with contemporary flare. To the emerging church, gatherings are seen as a place to experience the ancient, even mystical (and uses technology to do so).
12. To the modern church, services are designed to grow to accommodate the many people of the church. To the emerging church, gatherings are designed to accommodate many people but seen as a time when the church which meets in smaller groups gathers together.

“Neither [approach] is right or wrong,” states Kimball, “They are simply different values for different mindsets.”⁹³ Addressing the nature of shifting values in culture, he understands that the emerging church approach to worship will one day be too antiquated itself, for such is the nature of doing ministry in culture that is perpetually changing.⁹⁴

Emerging generations have grown up in a visual world. Kimball asserts that this reality has resulted in schools changing the way they teach in using more interactive

⁹³Ibid., 184.

⁹⁴Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 299-301.

forms of learning. “Yet in the church,” Kimball points out, “with these same people, we adhere primarily to auditory methods.”⁹⁵ Kimball, fearing observers will misconstrue his words, affirms the important of preaching, and such is reflected in the customary forty-minute sermons preached at VFC. He states, “I think we need to shift our design of worship gatherings as we understand our emerging culture and how people think, learn, and communicate.”⁹⁶ Kimball calls for a shift in worship methodology that he refers to as “multisensory worship.”

Kimball points out that God created humans as multisensory creatures, choosing to reveal Himself to humans through all of the senses. Scripture provides examples of how God’s people have engaged in worship through the senses of smell (Exod 25:6; Mal 1:11; 2 Cor 2:14-15), touch (Acts 6:6; Ps 47:1; 1 Cor 11:23-24), taste (Ps 34:8; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Rev 10:10), hearing (Ps 150; Matt 26:30; Acts 2:14), and sight (Exod 25:3-7; 1 Kgs 6:29-30).⁹⁷ In light of Scripture’s example of multisensory worship and because God created humans as creative creatures, Kimball states, “We should not be afraid of new (or old) forms of worship and teachings as long as they align with Scripture and we see life change as a result.”⁹⁸

Kimball uses the imagery of an artist’s palette to illustrate his concept of multisensory worship. An artist’s palette is comprised of many colors that can be mixed in various ways. These colors represent the different elements comprising the worship gathering. Kimball writes, “If we, metaphorically, are ‘painting’ our love and worship to

⁹⁵Ibid., 304.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 128-29.

⁹⁸Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 304.

God then we can look at emerging worship as expressing worship and learning about God when we gather as a church.”⁹⁹ Prior to exploring the various colors on the palette, attention is given to the two paint brushes, prayer and Scripture. The paint brushes are pervasive in nature because they influence every aspect of emerging worship.

Prayer is the first paintbrush dipped into all aspects of emerging worship. It influences the entire gathering. Kimball expounds, “We determine our sermon topics by praying about them. We select our songs by praying about them. Worship gatherings are not programs we put together. Rather, they are supernatural gatherings in which the Spirit works in our lives.”¹⁰⁰ The act of prayer is also woven throughout emerging worship gatherings, allowing congregants to quiet their hearts and seek the Spirit’s leading.¹⁰¹

Scripture is the second paintbrush. The Scriptures were central to the worship gatherings of the early church, and it is paramount for that practice to continue. As a point of clarification, Kimball writes, “We may dip the Scriptures into various ‘colors’ for expressing worship, but it needs to be the Scriptures, not the ‘colors,’ that shape what we do.”¹⁰² As Kimball plans gatherings at VFC, he ensures the Scriptures are “painted,” or expressed, through the colors of teaching, spoken word, prayer stations, and music. In summation, the paintbrushes of prayer and Scripture permeate and influence every aspect of the emerging worship gathering.

Attention is now given to the different colors on the artist’s palette. The first color on the palette is “sacred space,” which is the space where worship gatherings occur.

⁹⁹Ibid., 305.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 94.

¹⁰²Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 305.

After using the Scripture “paintbrush,” which shapes the worship gathering’s teaching theme or focus, consideration is given to the space’s arrangement, décor, and ambiance. The design of a sacred space is important because it is a reflection of the worshiping community’s values and theology.

Kimball provides several examples of how VFC typically designs its sacred space. First, the sacred space is dimly lit. Emerging culture associates darkness with spirituality and solemnity; therefore, VFC gatherings commonly use minimal lighting. Using candles is also widespread, for they “evoke the emotion that something serious and spiritual is happening.”¹⁰³

Second, the central focal point of the sacred space is reserved for the cross, as opposed to the pulpit which is most common in modern churches. Kimball explains,

We want our worship space to show immediately that Jesus is the reason we are here. We set up a smaller elevated stage area, but off to the side of the cross – so the teacher is still easily visible, but not as the focal point of the meeting. We did the same for our worship band. They generally arrange themselves off to the side of the room, where people can still see them, but not as the primary thing you look at during the musical worship. People then have the empty cross still as the focal point, and also the lyrics projected on screens.¹⁰⁴

Third, the sacred space is fashioned to create intimacy. “Although we are not a house church,” Kimball writes, “we still strive to create as much of a community feel as possible.”¹⁰⁵ Fostering an intimate setting involves arranging the sacred space in a way that communicates hominess. Illustrating this idea, he references a church of two hundred that organizes its sacred space like a living room where the entire room is set up with

¹⁰³Ibid., 310.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 309.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

only couches and chairs.¹⁰⁶ Creating intimacy may also involve using scented candles in order to engage a participant's sense of smell.¹⁰⁷ Kimball does admit creating an intimate setting becomes increasingly more challenging as the number of worship participants increases.¹⁰⁸

Developing and maintaining a church's sacred space involves organizing a creative team to oversee the sacred space. Involving a team enhances creativity and guards against creative burnout. The creative team at VFC, called the Palette Team, participates in a monthly brainstorming and planning meeting.¹⁰⁹ The Palette Team takes the gathering's theme, as established by the preacher's subject matter and Scripture passages, and weaves it throughout the sacred space. For example, if the gathering's theme centers on Pentecost, the predominant color used throughout the sacred space is red – representing the Holy Spirit's tongues of flame descended at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). Art connected to the Holy Spirit is also displayed.¹¹⁰ The Palette Team arrives two hours before worship gatherings in order to prepare the sacred space for worship.

Kimball realizes the idea of creating sacred space may sound superficial. He points out that whether realizing it or not, virtually every church gives considerable thought to their sacred space. A building's architecture, the sacred space's focal point, the wall hangings, and even the pastor's dress all contribute to shaping a church's sacred

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 310.

¹⁰⁷Scented candles are not a significant component of VFC's multisensory worship because they can be a distraction for participants with allergies or asthma. Dan Kimball and Lilly Lewin, *Sacred Space: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Multisensory Worship Experiences for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 35.

¹⁰⁸Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 309.

¹⁰⁹Kimball and Lewin, *Sacred Space*, 27.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 33-34.

space. As a concluding statement regarding creating sacred space, Kimball writes, “I do not want to sound picky about worship space, but those who do not think this is important most likely communicate things about their views of worship and of God that they would rather not communicate.”¹¹¹

The second color on the palette is musical worship. Musical worship is especially important to emerging generations because “music has been a large and influential part of the lives of emerging generations, much more than for most former generations.”¹¹² Kimball is intentional in defining worship as being more than just music. He writes,

We are constantly saying “musical worship” to remind people that there are also other aspects of worship. I think it is important to teach and model this, so that we communicate that “worship” is not just something that happens when people are singing.¹¹³

Kimball estimates a minimum of thirty-five minutes of the worship gathering is dedicated to musical worship.¹¹⁴ Musical worship at VFC is best described as blended using “both modern pop-worship songs and hymns.”¹¹⁵ VFC is intentional in teaching Scripture and doctrine through music; hence, they are discerning in their song selection. Regarding newer songs, the musical worship leader may accompany the song with a Scripture reading that ties the song’s lyrics. For hymns, historical background

¹¹¹Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 311.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., 313.

¹¹⁴The average worship gathering at VFC lasts one hour and forty-five minutes. Michael Dudit, Dan Kimball, “Preaching in the Emerging Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball,” *Preaching*, interview by Michael Dudit [on-line], accessed online 2 February 2011, available from <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11549470/>; Internet.

¹¹⁵Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 312. Hymns are generally adapted to a contemporary arrangement.

information about the author's life is sometimes given, and "the worship leader often stops and teaches the meaning of words that may be confusing... to make sure people are understanding what we are singing about."¹¹⁶ This act of explaining hymns is helpful for the believer and unbeliever. It allows worship gatherings to seek sensible without compromising the theological depth so fundamental to developing theologically astute believers.

Congregational participation is valued at VFC; hence, congregants are provided the opportunity to select songs during the gathering. Kimball explains,

The worship leader actually lists about thirty song titles in the bulletin, and almost every week there is a point in the worship gathering where people in the church can call out several songs from the list. Thus, the people take part in choosing the songs for the worship gathering. Yes, doing spontaneous songs like this lessens the 'quality' (there is always some shuffling of PowerPoint slides as the computer operator has to find the songs). Yet it strongly communicates that we are in this together, that everyone plays a part.... We want to honor God in all we do, but some worship gatherings do feel so much like a performance that it comes across as being inauthentic, even if the hearts of those leading it are authentic.¹¹⁷

Kimball does express some concern over emerging generations' enthusiasm for musical worship. Emerging generations are susceptible to the danger of selecting a church based primarily on music style. He writes, "In the past, people chose churches based on denomination. Then it switched to people choosing churches because of the preaching. Sadly, I believe this emphasis has shifted, among emerging generations, to the music."¹¹⁸ Kimball is attempting to counteract this mindset by challenging emerging

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 312.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 311.

generations to “define the church more holistically” by not evaluating churches exclusively on their style of worship.¹¹⁹

The third color on the palette is teaching through spoken word. Teaching from the Bible is an indispensable element of a Christian worship gathering, and teaching through spoken word is a primary avenue for training to occur.¹²⁰ Due to this color’s overlapping nature with Kimball’s methodological approach to preaching, examination of spoken word will be reserved for later in this chapter.

The fourth color is fine arts, painting, and sculpture. Emerging worship stresses the need to teach through multiple senses, yet Kimball realizes the concept of proclaiming Jesus’ teachings without the use of words may sound abnormal. He explains,

The Bible is written in words. But other senses can teach and proclaim. Jesus was the Word in flesh. God did not send just words, but also flesh. Emerging worship uses words, but we do not want to limit communication to only words. Earlier I tried to show that people are not all auditory learners. Thus, in preaching we can also use images to help us teach. Quite often when I am preaching, I use art on slides with biblical scenes portraying the section of the Scripture on which I am preaching. I primarily use ancient art because it is public domain (I don’t have to pay any usage fees) and less likely to be “cheesy.” I occasionally use photographs. I try to think through how to communicate with words and images, not for the sake of using images, but to be a better communicator and help others retain the information. . . . Art and visuals can emotionally connect with people in ways that words cannot. So, if we see art as a way both to express worship and to teach and proclaim Scripture, then it should only enhance our communication, enabling people who express themselves through art to be able to do so as an act of worship.¹²¹

It is not uncommon at VFC for artists to paint during the worship gathering. Kimball cites an example when he preached a two-week series on heaven and hell, and an

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., 313.

¹²¹Ibid., 323.

artist painted the sermons.¹²² This use of art was a visual expression of Kimball's verbal teaching. Kimball contends that art does not distract from teaching; rather, it enhances it and allows for deeper spiritual engagement.¹²³

A fifth color on the palette is prayer stations. Emerging worship utilizes prayer stations for the purpose of providing worshipers "time and space to pray and quiet their hearts."¹²⁴ Prayer stations are typically small areas located on the edge of the room partitioned by black curtains. They consist of a table draped with a cloth and holding various props related to the gathering's central theme.¹²⁵ Worshipers are encouraged to enter prayer stations after the message has ended and during the musical worship. Musical worship after the message is more contemplative in nature and generally lasts twenty-five minutes, allowing sufficient time for prayer and meditation. Kimball estimates that one-fourth of worshipers at VFC enter into a prayer station after the message.

Designing and implementing prayer stations are time consuming; hence, VFC formed a Prayer Team to take on these responsibilities. Kimball, describing two discipleship-themed prayer stations, writes,

On this table we had placed a baton like those used in relay races and surrounded it with verses that had to do with passing on the faith. Questions laid on the table

¹²²Kimball provides further explanation in stating that the artist stood near the front of the worship space and as he preached on heaven, the artist "painted on a large canvas images of light and color and beauty." The next week, as Kimball taught on hell, the artist took the painting from the week before and transformed it into a dark hell, representing the absence of God. The entire canvas was black by the end of Kimball's message. *Ibid.*, 324.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 325.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 328.

¹²⁵*The Emerging Church*, 166. Kimball provides extensive detail regarding how to implement prayer stations within a worship gathering in *Sacred Space*, 83-134. He categorizes each type of prayer station by theme and Scripture references, articulates the activities appropriate for each prayer station, and provides a list of supplies necessary to set up the prayer station.

were, “Are you discipling and mentoring another to be an apprentice of Jesus?” and, “Who are you passing your faith along to?” We had a prayer station with a lifesaver prop in the center, representing the need to be sharing with others the rescue we experienced through Jesus. As people stopped at the table, some would get on their knees and ask God to put people in their lives with whom to share the news of the gospel and the kingdom.¹²⁶

VFC’s Prayer Team has designed hundreds of such prayer stations. Kimball realizes that adequately describing the dynamics of prayer stations in writing is difficult.¹²⁷ He understands also that the concept of prayer stations may not appeal to some churches. He does comment that prayer stations have demonstrated themselves effective at VFC in providing worshipers “the time to see if the Spirit may be moving in their hearts to convict them or encourage them.”¹²⁸

The sixth and final color on the palette is film, video, and photography. Kimball utilizes film clips during his message “to set up a point or develop tension to which people can relate.”¹²⁹ VFC also produces street interview videos to “help Christians gain insights into the thoughts of nonbelievers and enable nonbelievers sitting in the pews to hear their thoughts voiced.”¹³⁰ Additionally, looping videos of images or

¹²⁶Ibid., 167.

¹²⁷Kimball expounds on this thought stating, “It is hard to describe these things in writing but I must say that it is not chaotic. It is beautiful to see people slip out of their chairs and go find a place where they can kneel down (the Hebrew word for worship means “to bow down”), where they can interact creatively with Scripture and the message. By no means does everyone suddenly get up and do this. It is a natural thing. Some people slip out to go to the stations, and the rest remain seated to sing, to reflect, to pray. There is a slow movement of people to prayer stations or to slip behind the curtains for private prayer if they want to do that. By the end of the musical set, generally people sense that the meeting is ending, and they make their way to their seats again. These prayer stations are all saturated in Scripture for people to read, and almost always they tie directly into the teaching. We do not do these every week, but over half the time we have something like I’ve just described.” Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 327.

¹²⁸Ibid., 328.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 151.

colors are used for “the purpose of slowing down and focusing on Scripture and prayer.”¹³¹

While many emerging churches utilize film and video liberally, VFC is more reserved in its use.

In our church we use video clips from movies only every few months, both to avoid bringing too much modern church into our services and so that when we do use them, they are a refreshing and effective tool. We never use a clip from a movie that we wouldn't recommend in its entirety. Though this might appear to be legalistic, I feel a responsibility to use only films that I believe would honor God (Phil. 4:8).¹³²

Kimball believes technology is a wonderful ally for ministry; however, it also has great potential for abuse and distraction if not closely monitored.¹³³

Kimball purposely does not include communion or baptism as a color on the palette. Explaining his exclusion of communion, “I did not include Communion on the palette, because it is such a central part of worship. It is not simply a ‘color’ of a palette for worship; it is a holy sacrament, and my assumption is that churches take Communion seriously.”¹³⁴ As a note of clarification, although Kimball refers to communion and baptism as sacraments, he understands them to be ordinances and adheres to a Baptist understanding of both ordinances.¹³⁵

¹³¹Ibid., 152.

¹³²Ibid., 151.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 329.

¹³⁵Below are two examples where Kimball and VFC documents refer to baptism and communion as sacraments. Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 329. “Section Two: The Doctrinal Beliefs of Our Church,” *Vintage Faith New Members Course Materials*, 10-12. Kimball admits to not have given thorough consideration to why he chose to use the term “sacrament” over “ordinance.” Kimball states that he will consider a future change in terminology. Dan Kimball, email to author, 5 July 2011.

VFC participates in the Lord's Supper once a month. The elements are positioned and partaken at the front of the worship space.¹³⁶ During these worship gatherings, Scripture readings, teaching through spoken word, music, and other means of worship generally focus on the work of Christ on the cross and its implications. Detailing a worship gathering where communion was observed, Kimball describes one creative method for highlighting the work of Christ,

In one worship gathering, we were focusing on how we are the light of Jesus. So we set up the room with a huge map of our county on the ground. We had people come forward to a cross to take Communion; the elements were served from beneath the cross. However, after they took the cup and the bread they also took a small glow-stick (an inch-long plastic stick that glows when it is bent). The teaching explained that, by putting faith in Jesus and His resurrection, we receive His light. We taught that we are supposed to shine that light where we live and work. Yet the light is not our own. It comes from Jesus. People then walked over to the large map and placed the glow-stick at the location on the map where they work or live. Several hundred glow-sticks were all over the map, showing how Jesus gave us, as the church, His light to shine. We could vividly see on a map the many places where our church would be living out the light of Jesus.¹³⁷

Communion is a central part of worship in most emerging worship gatherings because of its centrality in the early church.¹³⁸

VFC performs baptisms three or four times annually, a practice driven partially by pragmatic reasons. VFC's building, originally occupied by a Presbyterian church, does not have a baptistery. The church uses a portable baptistery that is typically positioned between the main stage and the first row of pews.¹³⁹ Kimball describes baptisms at VFC:

¹³⁶“Section Two: The Doctrinal Beliefs of Our Church,” 12.

¹³⁷Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 329.

¹³⁸Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 94.

¹³⁹Dan Kimball, “The Joy of Baptisms,” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (June 2008) [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2011; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2008/06/the-joy-of-bapt.html; Internet.

We do not do baptisms very differently from most churches. We allow people to share how God has moved in their lives and what led to their baptism. Baptism is thus a public testimony of salvation to the church community. People celebrate with the one being baptized as they hear the story behind the baptism. Baptisms are scheduled during different times in the worship gathering, depending on the individual and where the baptism best seems to fit in the order of that particular worship gathering.¹⁴⁰

Summarizing the multisensory approach to worship, Kimball advises church leaders to examine their motives prior to implementing. Multisensory worship gatherings should be implemented for the appropriate reasons. “The ultimate goal of creating and designing emerging worship gatherings is to glorify God and make disciples,” according to Kimball, “it’s not about the cool things we do in worship.... The goal is to see those in our church community become disciples of Jesus and sacrificial worshipers.”¹⁴¹

Kimball’s Approach to Preaching

Kimball’s objective in preaching is changed lives; and in part, changed lives come as a result of modifying homiletical methodologies for the purpose of effective communication to one’s audience.¹⁴² Changing homiletics is necessary, claims Kimball, because the audience is changing.¹⁴³ Kimball’s approach presumes that a different audience with a different worldview requires a different methodology. Even as Kimball promotes a rethinking of homiletics, he contends that preaching in emerging culture must

¹⁴⁰Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 329-30.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 329.

¹⁴²Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 174. Kimball acknowledges the Holy Spirit’s role in convicting and drawing people to Jesus. The intent of this statement is not meant to undermine Kimball’s view of the Holy Spirit’s role in the salvation process. He writes, “Of course, no matter how we teach or preach, it is the Spirit of God who does the convicting (John 16:8) and guides people to all truth (John 16:13). But our job is to take into consideration how we present truth to the people we hope to see transformed.” Ibid., 187.

¹⁴³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 173.

remain committed to the truths of Scripture. He writes, “In a culture void of truth and lacking understanding of the scriptural story, we need to proclaim, herald, and preach all the more.”¹⁴⁴ Despite some observers’ misperception that emerging churches “dislike preaching,” Kimball believes preaching is a “central and critical part” of the church’s mission.¹⁴⁵

Kimball lays out three foundational assumptions that should undergird preaching to all generations. He exhorts his readers to adhere to these timeless assumptions:¹⁴⁶

1. That you will prayerfully study and exegete the Scriptures to accurately communicate their meaning. More than ever, we need to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).
2. That when you preach, Jesus will be the ultimate focus of your sermons, and that you will not just be giving information about him but also tell people how to relate to and experience Jesus as his disciples (John 5:39).

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 173.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 173. Some evangelicals have promoted the idea that the role of preaching is minimized in emerging churches. John MacArthur made the claim that emerging churches “dislike preaching” in a fund-raising letter he sent to supports of the *Grace to You* radio program. Placing the claim in its fuller context, MacArthur wrote, “If you haven’t heard of the Emerging Church, you will. The Emerging Church movement is wildly popular with people who are dissatisfied with orthodox doctrine, dogmatic preaching, and traditional worship. People who are drawn to the Emerging Church generally place high value on ambiguity and mystery. They reject the notion that God’s Word is clear, and that anyone can really understand its meaning. That means every doctrine you and I find precious is subject to new interpretation, doubt, and even wholesale rejection. Everything is being questioned and deconstructed. Unlike the noble Bereans who used Scripture to test what they were taught and refine their understanding of the truth, people associated with the Emerging Church regard God’s Word as too full of warrant handling any truth in a definitive way. The result is a movement that thrives on disorganization, lends itself to mysticism, distrusts authority and dislikes preaching, feeds intellectual pride, and recognizes few (if any) doctrinal or moral boundaries.” John MacArthur, “Step Inside the Emerging Church: The New Movement Creating Chaos in a Congregation Near You,” *Grace to You Ministries*, letter to ministry supporters, 6 December 2006. Kimball, in disagreement of MacArthur’s evaluation, addressed several of MacArthur’s assertions in a blog post. Kimball pointed out that his sermons, often lasting forty-five minutes, are centered on the Scriptures, advocate orthodox doctrine, and never sidestep teachings on sin and repentance. For Kimball’s entire response, see Dan Kimball, “Please Don’t Stereotype the Emerging Church.” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (December 2006) [on-line]; accessed 1 March 2009; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/12/saddened_by_joh.html; Internet.

¹⁴⁶This list is quoted from Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 174.

3. That no matter what preaching style or method you may use, your goal is to see listeners' lives change so they can truly be ambassadors for Jesus (2 Cor. 5:20) and messengers of kingdom living.

These assumptions reinforce Kimball's commitment to the authoritative nature of Scripture and preaching that leads to both right belief and right practice.

Kimball's attitude toward preaching places importance on the character of the preacher. Emerging generations, prone to greater skepticism of leadership than previous generations, demand consistency from the preacher's words and actions.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, it is the preacher's life that "will preach better than anything we can say" because emerging generations "look at our hearts more than at the words we speak."¹⁴⁸ Kimball writes, "Preaching in the emerging church involves our hearts, marriages, singleness, families, friends, creativity, speech, attitudes, bodies, actions, jokes, whispers, shouts, glances, secrets, thoughts, and yes, our sermons too."¹⁴⁹ A preacher's life outside the pulpit significantly impacts the preacher's effectiveness inside the pulpit.

Kimball claims that prayerful dependence on God is intricately connected to the preacher's effectiveness.¹⁵⁰ This dependency is reflected in Kimball's routine prior to the preaching act. Before each sermon he retreats to a private room to pray, where he walks around in circles, raises his arms in the air, and calls upon the Lord. He describes his prayer in this manner, "Lord, I surrender everything to you. I cannot do this without

¹⁴⁷For further discussion of emerging generations' skepticism toward authority, see Spencer Burke, "From the Third Floor to the Garage," in *Stories of Emergence*, ed. Mike Yanconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/EmergentYS, 2003), 27-39.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 194-95.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 194.

¹⁵⁰Kimball references the words of E. M. Bounds as the "key to vintage preaching for the emerging church." Ibid., 196. Kimball quotes E. M. Bounds stating "The preacher must pre-eminently be a man of prayer. His heart must graduate in the school of prayer. In the school of prayer only can the heart learn to preach. No learning can make up for the failure to pray. No earnestness, no diligence, no study, no gifts will supply its lack." E. M. Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), 26.

you. May your Spirit speak through me. Your will, not mine. I cannot do this without you, please speak through me.”¹⁵¹ Kimball states that he cannot preach without full surrender to the Spirit of God because “The Spirit is the true source of preaching that has power.”¹⁵²

Kimball’s approach to preaching represents a significant shift from the preaching methods of the modern church. Kimball highlights eight examples of the changing values distinguishing the modern church from the emerging church. They are as follows:¹⁵³

1. To the modern church, the sermon is the focal point of the worship service. To the emerging church, the sermon is one part of the experience of the worship gathering.
2. To the modern church, the preacher serves as a dispenser of biblical truths to help solve personal problems in modern life. To the emerging church, the preacher teaches how the ancient wisdom of Scriptures applies to kingdom living as a disciple of Jesus.
3. The modern church emphasizes the explanation of what truth is. The emerging church emphasizes the explanation and experience of who truth is.
4. To the modern church, the starting point is with the Judeo-Christian worldview (Acts 17:1-3). To the emerging church, the starting point is the Garden of Eden and the retelling of the story of creation and of the origins of man and sin (Acts 17:22-34).
5. To the modern church, biblical terms like *gospel* and *Armageddon* don’t need definition. To the emerging church, biblical terms like *gospel* and *Armageddon* need to be deconstructed and redefined.
6. To the modern church, the scriptural message is communicated primarily with words. To the emerging church, the scriptural message is communicated through a mix of words, visuals, art, silence, testimony, and story.

¹⁵¹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 196.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³This list is quoted from *ibid.*, 173-75.

7. To the modern church, preaching in a worship service is the primary way one learns from the Scriptures during the week. To the emerging church, preaching in a worship gathering is a motivator to encourage people to learn from the Scriptures throughout the week.
8. To the modern church, preaching takes place within the church building during a worship service. To the emerging church a lot of the preaching takes place outside of the church building in the context of community and relationships.

These value comparisons, according to Kimball, demonstrate a considerable severance in the preaching philosophy of the modern and emerging church.¹⁵⁴ These pithy statements are oversimplified; however, they help capture the essence of emerging churches' reaction against modern church preaching methodology.

Kimball's methodological approach to preaching is governed by three primary ideas. The first idea is that preaching should be "theotopical" – comprised of both expository and topical preaching.¹⁵⁵ Merging these two homiletical approaches requires the preacher to properly exegete the Scriptures while embracing "the opportunity to shape a theological worldview for people by telling the story."¹⁵⁶ Essential to this approach is having a well-defined theological concept that can be understood and explained by "how

¹⁵⁴John Bohannon, in *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, acknowledges this severance in his referring to Kimball's preaching as a "new method" because of its combining "both verbal (monosensory) and experiential (multi-sensory) proclamation. John Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders – Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt* (USA: Create Space Publishers, 2010). An online copy is available from <http://theresurgence.com/files/pdfs/6x9-Full-Online-Ebook.pdf>; Internet.

¹⁵⁵"Theotopical" is a term Kimball coined. *Ibid.*, 179-80. Debates over proper homiletical methodology are virtually nonexistent in emerging churches, claims Kimball, because emerging generations do not possess "the church backgrounds to form opinions. They will complain, however, if they aren't deeply learning about the God they seek to encounter." *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 180. Kimball recommends the following "theotopical" messages: preaching that teaches kingdom living as a disciple of Jesus; the triune God; Jesus as the only way to God; biblical understanding of human sexuality; redefining marriage and family to new generations; the reality of hell; and the trustworthiness of Scripture. *Ibid.*, 180-83.

it fits into the story of the Bible.”¹⁵⁷ Kimball’s preaching generally exegetes a specific passage, often verse-by-verse, to establish a central theme. Subsequently, he demonstrates how that theme is captured throughout the meta-narrative of Scripture.¹⁵⁸

Kimball’s hermeneutical approach in reading the Bible diachronically and synchronically drives his homiletics.¹⁵⁹ Historical contextualization is crucial for understanding the meta-narrative; hence, Kimball often spends significant time constructing historical background. The goal of Kimball’s “theotopical” approach is to help “post-Christian listeners to see the world through a theological, big-picture, scriptural story lens.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 180. Kimball cites an example of this concept, “I recently taught a Christmas series in which my goal was to theologically teach how each person of the triune God of eternity was involved in the Christmas narrative.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁸This evaluation is based on a select number of sermons and the testimony of Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 128. Kimball’s implemented his “theotopical” approach in a sermon he preached on May 1, 2011. After a lengthy introduction, he provided the historical background information on Psalm 27 and proceeded to work through the chapter. Having established the central theme of the chapter as trusting God in all circumstances, he illustrated the theme with several biblical illustrations culminating in the theme’s ultimate fulfillment in the believer’s salvation through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Kimball’s preaching also demonstrated a strong emphasis on personal application. Dan Kimball, “Psalm 27,” *Imago Dei Community Church* (1 May 2011) [on-line], accessed 17 June 2011, available from <http://www.imagodeicommunity.com/sunday/sermon-archive/preacher/dan-kimball/>; Internet. Kimball preached a sermon on October 10, 2010 followed a similar pattern to that described above. He began with an examination of Matthew 9:35-38, highlighting Jesus’ compassion for the lost. He then examined God’s compassion as illustrated through the Book of Jonah. Kimball devoted significant energy to articulating Israelite and Ninevite history and the relationship between those two nations. Kimball challenged the audience to avoid the mistake of Jonah by cultivating compassionate hearts toward unbelievers. Dan Kimball, “Reflecting Christ’s Compassion,” *Imago Dei Community Church* (10 October 2010) [on-line], accessed 17 June 2011, available from <http://www.imagodeicommunity.com/sunday/sermon-archive/preacher/dan-kimball/>; Internet.

¹⁵⁹See page 96 for definitions of the diachronic and synchronic approaches. The Gospel Coalition, a network of conservative evangelical leaders, endorses a hermeneutical approach that practices both approaches. Their Theological Vision for Ministry statement reads, “We believe the two [diachronic and synchronic approaches] are integral for grasping the meaning of the biblical gospel. The gospel is the declaration that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has come to reconcile individuals by his grace and renew the whole world by and for his glory.” “Theological Vision for Ministry,” *Gospel Coalition* [on-line]; accessed 6 September 2011; available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/vision/>; Internet.

¹⁶⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 180.

Kimball acknowledges his preaching methodology is unconventional and noticeably different from the homiletical instruction he received at Western Seminary.¹⁶¹ The “breaking preaching down into an academic outline” such as “point 1a, point 2b,” may be effective for some, but not in the context of emerging culture.¹⁶² Kimball states that emerging generations generally view this style of preaching to be like a Tony Robbins’ presentation “with a Bible verse thrown in.”¹⁶³ The challenge Kimball sees with preaching to emerging generations is striking an appropriate balance between being academic and historical while maintaining applicability.¹⁶⁴

A second governing idea is that one’s preaching methodology should “create a culture of questioning and dialogue instead of a one-way format.”¹⁶⁵ Kimball’s biblical foundation is Acts 17:11, which he refers to as one of his favorite verses.¹⁶⁶ He writes,

The Bereans went home and studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true. God commended them for that! I think that, in our non-trusting culture, preachers need to build trust with people all the more. Our preaching needs to have the sense that we are not above others, that people can ask questions and dialogue with us.¹⁶⁷

Kimball’s endorsement of a Berean preaching model – welcoming questions and dialogue – is a shift from the methodology found in most evangelical churches.

¹⁶¹Kimball, “Preaching in the Emerging Church.”

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Expounding on this idea, Kimball writes, “So many churches move to the extreme – either all application, pulling out a verse or two from the sermon generally out of context, or all knowledge, pumping up heads with hardly any heart in it.” Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 314.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 318.

¹⁶⁶Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 192.

¹⁶⁷Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 318.

Kimball writes, “Evangelicals have been criticized—many times rightly so—for being dogmatic and closed-minded. For too long we have been doing all the talking, without any dialogue.”¹⁶⁸ Kimball, who welcomes questions and dialogue during his preaching, believes evangelicals’ propensity toward one-way communication created a trust issue with emerging generations.¹⁶⁹ The most effective means of removing this trust issue, according to Kimball, is “to encourage, not discourage, people to think, to question, to discover.”¹⁷⁰ Welcoming dialogue may best be done by setting “up open forums in which people can engage in deeper dialogue” about Scripture and aspects of Christian living.¹⁷¹ A benefit of open discussion during worship gatherings is that it fosters a culture of self-feeders where believers are trained to raise “questions and dig deep on their own.”¹⁷²

A third governing idea is that preachers should not present themselves as the “Bible-answer-man” or “message giver and problem solver,” but “preacher as shepherd and fellow journeyer.”¹⁷³ Preachers, while viewing themselves as a spiritual director and guide, should admit “that the Bible and the Christian life are sometimes messy and even

¹⁶⁸Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 192-93.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 193.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Ibid. Kimball admits establishing helpful dialogue in a larger worship setting does present challenges. Describing one practice that has proven effective at VFC, he writes, “In our congregation, we also have ‘theological think tanks’ about once a month. These occur after the worship gathering is over. We allow people to write out questions, comments, and disagreements on cards. I then have an open forum about their questions, dialoguing with them. I am always saying, ‘No question is dumb,’ and ‘Don’t feel bad if you disagree with me, but ask me why I reached the conclusion I did.’ These are wonderful times of interaction with people about the sermon, showing them that I care about their opinions and questions more than just spouting out my own.” Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 318. Although Kimball encourages questions and dialogue in these “theological think tanks,” he does provide guidance by monitoring them as best as possible. Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 193.

¹⁷²“Section Six: Theologians,” 3.

¹⁷³Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 317; idem, *The Emerging Church*, 194.

mysterious.”¹⁷⁴ Honesty regarding the difficulties of the Christian life should characterize preaching in emerging worship.

This approach as preacher as fellow journeyer, according to Kimball, does not suggest compromise or avoidance of hard issues. Kimball writes, “We must be bold in our preaching, but boldness need not come across as arrogant or ‘know-it-all.’”¹⁷⁵ Modernistic preaching, states Kimball, possesses a tendency to reduce the Christian life to “three easy steps to a happy family.”¹⁷⁶ Conversely, emerging preaching avoids “wrapping things in neat packages, because life is not a neat package.”¹⁷⁷ First, Kimball challenges preachers to exhibit transparency by inviting others to struggle with him when interpreting difficult passages where multiple interpretations are possible. Second, Kimball believes preachers should demonstrate appropriate openness in confessing to various life struggles during the preaching act.¹⁷⁸ Appropriate transparency and vulnerability communicate well in emerging culture.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this chapter was to provide the general framework of Kimball’s methodology, giving particular attention to his approach to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching. This chapter highlighted those aspects of Kimball’s methodology that are central and indispensable to his approach. This survey uncovered a

¹⁷⁴Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 317.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 318.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 193.

methodological approach distinctly shaped to reach and minister to those in emerging culture. Chapter 5 provides an assessment of Kimball's theological and methodological approaches.

CHAPTER 5

AN ASSESSMENT OF DAN KIMBALL'S MINISTRY

Introduction

Dan Kimball's theology and methodology were examined in chapters three and four. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Kimball's theology and methodology. In addition, I will suggest some areas where the traditional church can benefit in their ministry to emerging generations from Kimball's insights. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one critiques Kimball's ministry by identifying its weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Section two evaluates Kimball's ministry in terms of its positive contributions. Both sections are divided into five subsections. These subsections assess Kimball's ministry in terms of theology, evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching.

Weaknesses of Kimball's Ministry

Research of Kimball's ministry reveals areas of weakness and vulnerability. This section provides a critique of the weaknesses present in Kimball's approach.

Theology

A noticeable weakness in Kimball's theology is that he does not consistently communicate appropriate theological conviction. This concern is particularly evident in

his handling of secondary doctrinal issues such as baptism and the role of women in ministry, but it also extends into core teachings.

In *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, Kimball writes, “I lean toward more historic Nicene Creed orthodoxy, and I still remain overall conservative in my theology. Yet I do allow mystery and exploration in some areas of theological belief.”¹ Kimball’s claim of being open to theological “exploration” is not the more concerning aspect of this statement since he is not referring to core doctrines.² The primary concern is his “leaning” posture towards historical orthodoxy. This type of inexact language communicates uncertainty and an inappropriate lack of confidence.³ It leads one to wonder which doctrines he leans toward and which he does not. This kind of statement leaves him open to criticism, and rightfully so.

Further illustrating this point, Kimball writes in *An Emerging Manifesto of Hope*, “I am not ashamed nor do I feel ‘unemerging’ in saying that I hold to and will even defend some core or fundamental beliefs. We don’t have to feel close-minded or overly dogmatic when saying we hold to certain truths.”⁴ This statement’s second sentence is endorsable, but Kimball’s claim to only “defend some core or fundamental beliefs” is

¹Dan Kimball, “Response to Mark Driscoll,” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber, 39-41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 41.

²See Dan Kimball, “Humble Theology: Re-exploring Doctrine While Holding on to Truth,” *An Emerging Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, 213-24 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 216. A level of vulnerability is present when suggesting “exploration in some areas of theological belief” because it assumes an ability to properly categorize what doctrines do and do not qualify for appropriate exploration.

³As highlighted by D. A. Carson, Kimball’s tendency to use inexact language also extends into his usage of theological terms such as “deconstruct” and “redefine.” D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 83-84. When asked about the phrase “I lean toward more Nicene Creed historical orthodoxy,” Kimball acknowledged the wording was weak, and in retrospect, he wished he had used clearer and stronger language in articulating his commitment to orthodoxy. Dan Kimball, email to author, 16 November 2011.

⁴Kimball, “Humble Theology,” 223.

disconcerting and raises questions as to what core beliefs he would not defend. Research reveals Kimball as unwavering in his adherence to core Christian doctrines; however, the manner in which he communicates sometimes lacks the confidence warranted when articulating Scripture's foundational teachings.

It seems Kimball's "humble" theological approach leaves him reluctant to say forthrightly that he stands firmly on historical Christian orthodoxy, instead tending to qualify his statements. This practice leaves him open to questions about his true doctrinal convictions. Leaders like Kimball must be clear and unwavering in their adherence to first order Christian truth, for "it is not humble to be hesitant where God has been clear and plain."⁵

Kimball's lack of doctrinal conviction is illustrated explicitly when evaluating his views regarding secondary level doctrinal teachings, such as the mode of baptism. VFC teaches and practices infant dedication and believer's baptism by immersion. Deviation from this mode has not occurred in VFC's history. However, Kimball states that if asked by a member to perform an infant baptism ceremony, the church would allow for such under two specific circumstances.⁶ First, the ceremony would be private – intended only for family and close friends. Second, the ceremony would be performed by an evangelical minister holding covenant theology convictions regarding pedobaptism. VFC's new member material presents a clear biblical argument for baptism of the believer involving "immersion... follows the biblical pattern of baptism," but this

⁵Mark Dever, "The Pastor's Understanding of His Own Role," *Together for the Gospel Conference 2006* (26 April 2008) [on-line]; accessed 14 July 2008; available from <http://t4g.org/06/media/>; Internet.

⁶Dan Kimball, email to author, 29 August 2011. Kimball acknowledges that his willingness to allow infant baptism is partially motivated by the fact a number of VFC members have Presbyterian roots. VFC absorbed into its congregation a small Presbyterian church in January 2008. The two churches had previously shared the same building.

practice regarding infants compromises the church's statement of faith and calls into question their commitment to believer's baptism.

This approach to baptism can lead to confusion in the minds of the congregation. On the one hand, they have joined a church that teaches believers' baptism by immersion. On the other hand, the church will practice infant baptism. This not only can be confusing to believers hungry to know the biblical teaching on the subject, but it leads one to wonder if people can be members of VFC if they do not believe that believer's baptism by immersion is the biblical model. Otherwise, why make exceptions for members if they do in fact hold to the church's statement of faith?

Kimball also communicates a lack of doctrinal conviction in terms of the role of women in ministry, which he claims "is a major issue" for churches engaging in postmodern ministry.⁷ Despite the subject's importance and Kimball's frequently addressing it in his writings, he does not express his personal convictions.⁸ Kimball's aversion in conveying his position on the role of women in ministry is rooted in three reasons. First, he contends that Scripture does not allow for absolute certainty on the subject.⁹ Second, his position aligns with his "humble" theological approach that openly explores those "theological beliefs [that] have changed throughout church history."¹⁰

⁷Dan Kimball, "Emerging Worship," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson, 288-333 (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2009), 318-19.

⁸For a detailed articulation of Kimball's thoughts on women in ministry as it relates to emerging culture, see Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 115-35. It appears Kimball feels adequate in limiting his theological guidance on the matter to simply stating postmoderns are less concerned with a church's doctrinal view (e.g., complementarianism or egalitarianism), and more concerned with how a church goes "about honoring, respecting, and empowering females within their view." *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹Dan Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber, 81-105 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 93.

¹⁰Kimball, "Humble Theology," 216.

Third, he confesses to not giving the in-depth study necessary to formulate a strong conviction.¹¹ When asked to articulate a view, Kimball stated that he believes women are qualified to hold key leadership roles; however, he felt most comfortable with males holding the lead pastor position.¹²

Contention with Kimball's position is two-fold. First, Kimball does not argue his understanding of the role of women in ministry from Scripture; rather, he defends his position by pointing to the diversity of opinions held by "wise and godly [Christian] leaders."¹³ Kimball's writings neglect interaction with key biblical texts (e.g., 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), and gives no substantial commentary when relevant passages are referenced (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15).¹⁴ Second, it seems amiss for Kimball, a leading voice in emerging generational ministry, to declare the role of women in ministry to be a major issue too big to ignore, yet not articulate his doctrinal conviction on the matter.¹⁵

If Kimball's claim that emerging generations are genuinely "hungry for truth today" and "drawn to our heartfelt... explanations," it seems logical that he would humbly, yet confidently, articulate and hold his theological convictions.¹⁶ As a recognized leader, Kimball has an opportunity and responsibility to clarify his doctrinal

¹¹Dan Kimball, interview, Marion, IN, 11 November 2010.

¹²Ibid. VFC currently has two females on its staff, holding the titles Director of Children's Ministry and Director of Community. Females are eligible for VFC's Leadership Council, which acts as their elder board. "Leadership Council and Staff Roles," *Vintage Faith Church Leadership Materials*, 1-2.

¹³Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 93.

¹⁴Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 124-25.

¹⁵Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 318-19.

¹⁶Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 206.

convictions and lead the missional movement to a more consistent expression of theological conviction.

Kimball's reluctance to make unequivocal statements with respect to theological convictions does speak to a broader concern regarding his overall strength as a leader. Kimball's congenial disposition, generally a positive asset to his ministry, reveals a deficiency in his leadership approach. His proclivity for finding agreement while minimizing points of contention, combined with his less autocratic, more democratic leadership style, leaves him vulnerable to compromising. Kimball's tendency to lack firmness when addressing contentious issues may inhibit his ability to make the difficult decisions strong leaders are required to make.

One of the most significant critiques of the ECM is in the area of doctrine. Recognized leaders like Kimball should be at the forefront of stating clearly and convictionally where they stand in order to sharpen an evident weakness of the ECM. If Kimball wants to be recognized as an authority in postmodern ministry, and he seems to as evidenced by his apologetic writings, then he must speak forthrightly on issues of doctrine. Kimball can greatly assist young leaders by stating his doctrinal positions with a greater sense of conviction.

Evangelism

An evaluation of Kimball's approach to evangelism exposes two areas of vulnerability, both related to his emphasis on relationship-based evangelism.¹⁷ The first is this approach, if not guarded against, can lead to "presence evangelism" without

¹⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 201.

“proclamation evangelism” – resulting in no evangelism at all.¹⁸ A relationship can be fostered, kindness and good deeds demonstrated, but the source behind the gospel-changed life never proclaimed. Evangelism in the context of relationship is a biblical concept (e.g., Matt 5:16; Acts 2:47; Phil 3:17). Peter assumes it in exhorting believers to “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of wrong doing, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet 2:12). The Bible endorses relationship-based evangelism, but evangelism in the Bible never fails to proclaim the gospel because “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

A second vulnerability is that relationship-based evangelism’s time-consuming nature can result in a lost sense of urgency to proclaim the gospel. This concern is all the more relevant in light of Kimball’s belief that building trust with postmoderns will “take a lot longer than in previous generations.”¹⁹ Guarding against this danger requires a greater intentionality to share the gospel in a timely manner. The Christian’s witness, as modeled by the apostles, is to be marked by urgency and passion (Acts 8:35, 4:19-20, 11:20; 1 Cor 2:21-24; 2 Tim 4:2).

Kimball’s promotion of relationship-based evangelism is logical, for it aligns with the postmodern affinity for authentic relationships. Despite relationship-based evangelism’s heightened value in emerging culture, churches should not restrict their approach to one specific evangelistic strategy. Implementing alternative approaches to

¹⁸Identifying this issue and describing “presence” and “proclamation” evangelism, Chuck Lawless writes “Presence evangelism is ‘getting next to people and helping them; doing good in the world’ – with the hope of, but not necessarily leading to sharing about Christ. Proclamation evangelism is simply speaking the gospel so that persons might respond to its truth. Chuck Lawless, “The Emerging Church and Evangelism,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Academics, 2009), 324.

¹⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 208.

evangelism (e.g., confrontational, door-to-door, event-based, service-oriented) establishes a healthier strategy, in part, because it capitalizes on the church's design in utilizing the collective gifts and resources of many believers. Kimball does not reject these other strategies, but contends that they are less effective in emerging culture than modern culture.²⁰

Discipleship

One of the challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of Kimball's discipleship strategy is VFC's failure to keep attendance and baptismal records prior to November 2010.²¹ Kimball describes VFC's decision for not keeping statistical information in stating,

At SCBC, they were number fanatics. Every week there was a sheet that was put in everyone's box in the church office which had a count for everything. The focus on numbers was overwhelming and put staff members in awkward positions because everyone was looking at everyone else's week-to-week attendance. It created a weird culture. Coming out of that, we decided not to count and for several years we didn't count anything. In retrospect, our decision was over-reactionary because numbers are important as they can signify degrees of health, and are helpful for planning purposes.²²

Kimball contends that discipleship models should be evaluated on their ability to "produce mission-minded disciples."²³ It therefore seems antithetical that VFC would not

²⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 204, 207-08; idem, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 217-18.

²¹VFC currently tracks both worship and small group attendance. As of August 2011, VFC averaged 875 in worship and 350 in mid-week community groups.

²²Dan Kimball, email to author, 1 September 2011. According to Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer, the practice of not keeping records is a growing trend in North American churches. Churches are less likely to keep attendance records for two reasons. First, church-wide accountability is increasingly viewed as intrusive and overbearing. Second, a stigma exists against measuring a church's health based on counting "bodies, budget, and buildings." Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 26, backcover.

²³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 217.

create a means for which to evaluate its own model's effectiveness in drawing and retaining disciples.

Statistical information can certainly be overemphasized in measuring church health. On the other hand, numbers are an appealing means for measuring church health because of their objectivity. Numbers also represent people, and people are of utmost importance. As valuable as numbers can be, they are nevertheless limiting. They cannot measure church health in terms of the life transformation, and they speak to what attracts and detracts, not to what is biblical. Statistical information possesses limitations and can invite an unhealthy value on numbers, but if used properly, they provide one tool for measuring a church's health.

Attendance records, for instance, aid in tracking church health from both a macro and micro-level. Evaluating attendance at a macro-level provides the capability to discern church-wide trends and is one means for measuring a ministry's overall health. Evaluating attendance at the micro-level allows for personal accountability through the tracking of individual attendance. Baptism records, which pertain more to evangelistic effectiveness, also provide churches with statistical data in which to assess effectiveness.²⁴ Due to VFC's recent decision to record worship and small group attendance, statistical analysis is a future possibility.

Kimball's writings do not place as strong an emphasis on discipleship compared to evangelism and worship. It thus makes sense that his contribution to the

²⁴According to Thom and Sam Rainer, a church is evangelistically healthy when it achieves a baptismal ratio (resident members/baptisms) of less than 20:1. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, "Wanted: More Evangelistic Churches," *Outreach Magazine*, January/February 2007, 16. Kimball estimates that in 2010, VFC performed thirty baptisms and averaged 750 in worship attendance. If using worship attendance instead of resident members, VFC's ratio is 25:1 and does not qualify as an evangelistic church. Worth noting is that VFC baptized only three individuals under the age of 19 in 2010; most of the individuals were in their twenties. Dan Kimball, email to author, 29 August 2011.

subject is not as significant. It also appears that shifts in culture effect discipleship strategies less than evangelism and worship.²⁵ This fact is evidenced by Kimball’s modern church versus emerging church value comparison charts. The discipleship chart not only illustrates less significant differences when compared to the others, but once hyperbolic language is removed, the differences are even less. The following two examples from the comparison chart help illustrate.

First, Kimball states that discipleship in the modern church is an “individual experience” while it is a “communal experience” in the emerging church. Discipleship at VFC primarily occurs through worship gatherings and small groups. This is very much like what can be found in many healthy modern churches. For example, many traditional churches are built on the foundation of expository preaching. Furthermore, many traditional churches have small group ministries where assimilation, pastoral oversight, and service are integral parts of the small groups. The reason one is considered individualistic and the other communal is unclear and not expounded. If Kimball is going to make this assertion, the onus is on him to provide evidence for its veracity.

Second, Kimball states that for modern churches, “the vision for small groups is to fill the ‘empty chair,’ develop leadership, and divide groups to reproduce.”²⁶ For the emerging church, “small groups provide a place of stability for those who have

²⁵This truth gains credence in the fact Belcher’s *Deep Church*, which proposes a third way between traditional and emerging, contains chapters on evangelism, worship, and preaching but not discipleship. Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009). When asked why *Deep Church* did not include a chapter on discipleship, Belcher stated that discipleship strategies do not represent a “big point of disagreement between the two sides.” Jim Belcher, email to author, 3 September 2011.

²⁶Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 215.

experienced divided families and instability in their world.”²⁷ Kimball’s description of the modern church depicts a disconnect from the ministry occurring in traditional churches. His claim that modern churches desire to “fill the empty chair” and “reproduce” sounds derogatory, as if to say traditional churches are only concerned with numbers. Undoubtedly, there are traditional churches, as well as emerging churches, that fit Kimball’s description. However, it is equally true that people matter in traditional churches, and ministry in these churches to “divided families” and those experiencing “instability” is occurring.

As the value comparison chart validates, the most prominent critique of Kimball’s discipleship approach is that it differs little from what one might find in a healthy traditional church. What Kimball emphasizes in his emerging discipleship approach (i.e., the interconnecting of evangelism into the discipleship process, updating language to reflect a church’s ethos, fasting and practicing silence, intergenerational connectedness) has been long practiced throughout evangelicalism.²⁸

Worship

An examination of Kimball’s approach to worship reveals a number of concerns and challenges. One concern is that Kimball’s commitment to biblically thoughtful and historically honoring worship appears partially tied into cultural relevance

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Donald Whitney’s 1991 *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* demonstrates that many of the discipleship practices Kimball identifies as valued in emerging churches have long been essential components of evangelical discipleship. Whitney devotes entire chapters to the following disciplines: Bible intake, prayer, worship evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and continued learning. Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishers, 1991).

rather than theological conviction.²⁹ This concern finds basis in Kimball's statement that neither the seeker-sensitive nor emerging approaches to worship are "right or wrong. They are simply different values for different mindsets."³⁰ Claiming both approaches as different yet equally valuable for these respective audiences seems inconsistent with Kimball's criticism of seeker-driven churches' overuse of media, removal of historical elements, anthropocentric preaching, and aversion to theological depth.³¹ Theological richness and Christ-centered preaching are not optional, but essential for all Christian worship for any generation. Emerging worship must remain biblically thoughtful, theologically robust, and historically honoring even if these components are not valued by future generations.

A second concern is related to the experiential nature of emerging worship. Emerging worship places an emphasis on multi-sensory engagement through the use of prayer stations, scented candles, painting, sculpting, corporate readings, meditation, and various forms of media.³² Some of these elements which can enhance Christian worship and are practiced in Scripture have the potential, if abused, to create a worship experience that is too experientially driven.³³ For instance, congregants may grow accustomed to the use of non-essential elements of worship (e.g., candles, art, multi-media, prayer stations) and then experience an inability to holistically engage in worship when the elements are

²⁹Emerging worship's commitment to Bible-centeredness and to historical elements of Christian worship (e.g., liturgy, hymns, ancient prayer and creedal readings) is articulated in Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 305-06, 320-21.

³⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 184.

³¹*Ibid.*, 25, 151, 178, 190-91,

³²Kimball, "Emerging Worship," 304-28.

³³See page 139 for Kimball's biblical argumentation for a multi-sensory approach to worship.

removed. The implementation of a multi-sensory approach is appropriate assuming an unhealthy dependence upon its experiential orientation is not developed. Emerging generations, whom Carson claims treasure “experience over against truth,” need to be aware of their susceptibility to confuse the moving of the Holy Spirit with emotionalism or existentialism.³⁴

Emerging worship also solicits a word of caution because of its high reliance upon human creativity. Inadvertently, this reliance can deceive Christian leaders into believing the moving of the Holy Spirit is somehow dependent upon the quality of the worship gathering. The following statement by Kimball illustrates this danger: “If we are serious about wanting to design worship services that the Spirit can use to transform lives, then we need to understand people. I do not see this as being anthropocentric.”³⁵ Kimball’s statement, which appears very anthropocentric, is precarious in its asserting that the Holy Spirit’s moving is somehow dependent upon man’s ingenuity for worship design. John 3:8 illustrates the Spirit’s ability to blow where He pleases. The Spirit’s sovereignty and freedom are not limited by man. Kimball’s highlighting the importance of creating a well-thought-out, relevant worship gatherings is constructive; however, this statement also illustrates a vulnerability in the multi-sensory worship approach.

A practical challenge of Kimball’s emerging worship is that its demands on time, organization, coordination, creativity, and physical energy negatively impact its

³⁴Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 29.

³⁵Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 301. This quote is not intended to demonstrate that Kimball holds to an unbiblical Pneumatological view. It is to illustrate a possible risk for those engaging in a multi-sensory approach to worship. Surveying Kimball’s theology reveals a biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit’s. See Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 187.

reproducibility and its overall practical implementation.³⁶ This reality is observably demonstrated in Kimball's prayer stations, which often involve significant planning and volunteerism.³⁷ Dan Wilt, critiquing Kimball's approach, states,

On a practical note, the emerging worship activity Kimball describes here sounds like a lot of work week in and week out. The moving of chairs, new experiments, the limited resources, and even the need for multifunctional rooms makes me tired just thinking about weekly setup.³⁸

The corporate worship of Christ's church, if understood properly, is costly. God deserves man's best when approaching His throne through worship. This understood, Kimball's approach has limited transferability because it involves a high degree of novelty with many components.

Preaching

This dissertation's assessment of Kimball's preaching is to some degree limited because access to Kimball's sermonic materials is limited. This evaluation is thus based on Kimball's writings, a select number of sermons provided by Kimball, and John

³⁶VFC utilizes a team of volunteers to oversee many of the different aspects of emerging worship. VFC's dependency on volunteerism, according to Kimball, results in a lower, but acceptable, quality of worship execution. *Ibid.*, 321.

³⁷Kimball provides detailed descriptions of prayer stations in *Sacred Space*. One example of a prayer station has worshipers helping in the design of a wall mosaic depicting the church as the Body of Christ. During the time of reflection subsequent the sermon, worshipers are invited to enter a prayer station to contemplate Scripture passages describing the church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Eph 4; Rom 12). After the worshiper has completed his or her time of prayer, a facilitator assists the worshiper in choosing a piece of broken glass or pottery and placing it on the mosaic. Kimball, explaining the logistics of the prayer station, states that an artist, a perhaps a contractor, are necessary for this project. He also provides a list of supplies that include the following: tables, tapestries, tile grout, broken and colorful pieces of pottery or glass of various sizes, tile adhesive, application brush, baseboards, decorative wood for edging, and protective gloves for each facilitator. Dan Kimball and Lilly Lewin, *Sacred Space: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Multisensory Worship Experiences for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 50-51.

³⁸Dan Wilt is the Director of the Institute of Contemporary and Emerging Worship Studies at St. Stephen's University in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. Dan Wilt, "Responses to Dan Kimball," in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009), 347.

Bohannon's evaluation of Kimball's preaching methodology in *Preaching and the Emerging Church*.

Kimball's preaching methodology is a positive model overall for emerging generational ministry. He maintains good interaction with the biblical text while providing historical context. He also exhibits giftedness in moving from the text to contemporary application.³⁹ One weakness of Kimball's preaching ministry is that VFC does not allow access to sermons.⁴⁰ First, sermon recordings are beneficial for church members unable to attend services for various reasons. Second, sermon recordings would enlarge Kimball's ministry platform, giving him a greater capacity to influence. Mark Driscoll, whose sermons draw 100,000 downloads each week from Mars Hill Church's website, is an example of how modern technology can be used to expand influence.⁴¹

Bohannon's evaluation of Kimball's preaching suggests that Kimball has a propensity to be overly sympathetic to sin.⁴² Kimball, according to Bohannon, exhibits winsomeness and authenticity in the pulpit crucial for overcoming the skepticism of emerging generations.⁴³ His sympathetic disposition also creates a strong connection with

³⁹See pages 155-56 for evidence of these assertions.

⁴⁰See page 20 for an explanation for why VFC does not record its worship gatherings. Despite VFC's website statement that sermon recordings are available for VFC members, Kimball said that VFC does not currently record their worship gatherings. Dan Kimball, email to author, 24 June 2011.

⁴¹Ronald Keener, "Mark Driscoll, Senior Pastor, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA," *Church Executive* (1 September 2008) [on-line]; accessed 4 September 2011; available from <http://churchexecutive.com/archives/mark-driscoll-senior-pastor-mars-hill-church-seattle-wa>; Internet.

⁴²John Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: An Examination of Four Founding Leaders – Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt* (USA: Create Space Publishers, 2010), 237. It should be noted that Bohannon's book did not interact with Kimball's sermonic materials.

⁴³Affirming Mark Driscoll's description of Kimball, Bohannon writes, "Winsome must just be the best term to describe Kimball... His winning, charming, and engaging presence has been a part of the movement from its inception." *Ibid.*, 52. Bohannon says Driscoll described Kimball as winsome at the National Conversation on the Emerging Church in 2007.

listeners.⁴⁴ The downside to Kimball's constitution, states Bohannon, is that his preaching, which does not avoid hard truths, can come across as lacking certitude and being too understanding of people's sinful tendencies.⁴⁵ Bohannon's assertion lacks strong evidence, however, and he offers no support from Kimball's sermonic materials. If Kimball's preaching does indeed blur the line separating compassion and compromise, evidence of such is not present in the few sermons procured for this dissertation.

Contributions of Kimball's Ministry

Research of Kimball's ministry reveals contributions in terms of theology, evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching. This section highlights those contributions present in Kimball's approach.

Theology

An examination of Kimball's theology reveals three areas of contribution. The first contribution relates to Kimball's adherence to Christian fundamentalism, as defined by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1910.⁴⁶ The term

⁴⁴Describing Kimball's unique ability to connect with people, Darren Seitz states, "No one close to Dan is objective because people love him and struggle to view weaknesses in him. Dan's likeable and quirky personality is uniquely gifted in connecting people to community and drawing them into the presence of God." Darrin Seitz, telephone interview by author, 14 March 2011.

⁴⁵Despite commending Kimball for "taking a stand against homosexuality as a viable lifestyle for followers of Jesus," Bohannon supports this claim by quoting several of Kimball's statements regarding homosexuality. Following Kimball's statement, "I have found that I just can't dismiss that in the Bible homosexual practice is considered sin," Bohannon writes, "This reads as if Kimball would prefer to bend toward culture's desire on the subject rather than celebrate God's beautiful plan from the beginning (Gen 2:24)." Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church*, 236-37.

⁴⁶For Kimball's view on Christian fundamentalism, see Kimball, "The Emerging Church and Missional Theology," 100-02; idem., *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 190-91. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church defined fundamentalism as belief in the "five fundamentals" of the faith: verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement by Jesus, and the bodily resurrection and future return of Jesus. *The Presbyterian Conflict* provides a historical explanation regarding the establishment of the "five fundamentals of the faith." Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1940).

“fundamentalism” carries considerable baggage among emerging generations, for they do not associate fundamentalism strictly with a set of core Christian teachings.⁴⁷ Instead, it is analogous with a more extended list of doctrines and a particular lifestyle.⁴⁸ Kimball is attempting to redefine fundamentalism by returning to its roots.⁴⁹

This process of redefining fundamentalism, according to Kimball, requires two important steps. First, Christians must demonstrate intentionality in reversing the cultural stereotypes associated with fundamentalism.⁵⁰ This reversal requires Christians to leave the protection of the Christian subculture and reengage mainstream culture. Second, Kimball calls for a theological re-categorization requiring Christians to sort through doctrines to determine their level of theological urgency.

⁴⁷In *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, Kimball provides a history of the term “fundamentalism” and how those in emerging culture understand it. Describing how emerging generations interpret the term, Kimball writes, “Today when people who like Jesus but not the church hear the term fundamentalist, they don’t think of people who only believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the bodily resurrection and return of Jesus. They think of people who are always saying negative things about the world, are anti-gay, take the whole Bible literally, are card-carrying Republicans, are pro-Israel, read end-times novels, and endorse snake handling and fire-and-brimstone preaching. They think of King-James, finger-pointing, tee-totaling, vengeful people who credit God for using natural disasters to punish people for sin, and who use Christian jargon and are arrogant and unloving toward anyone but themselves. I realize, of course, that this caricature doesn’t fit all fundamentalists, but this is the way many outside the church view any kind of conservative Christian. It’s why I never publicly use the word fundamentalist for myself, because the word has a different meaning today.” Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 191.

⁴⁸Kimball comments on the expansion of fundamentalism, “The list of five fundamentals doesn’t include a view of women in ministry, or of the end times, or of the creation-evolution debate (though it was implied that their understanding of the Bible argued against evolution). They don’t mention methods of baptism, or cultural matters such as dress codes, drinking alcohol, getting tattoos, style of worship, evangelistic methods, or political involvement.” Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 190.

⁴⁹Evangelicals such as Carl F. H. Henry have also recognized a need to redefine fundamentalism. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1947).

⁵⁰Mainstream culture’s understanding of fundamentalism is often a caricature of a few individuals. For instance, the late Jerry Falwell, a SBC pastor and political activist, is commonly cited as an example of “fundamentalism gone wrong” because of his provoking statements on divisive issues. See David Kuo, “Jerry Falwell’s Mixed Legacy,” *Beliefnet* (2 March 2010) [on-line]; accessed 12 June 2011; available from <http://blog.beliefnet.com/jwalking/>; Internet.

The error of expanding fundamentalism, according to Kimball, is its inability to establish separation between primary doctrines and those of secondary and tertiary importance.⁵¹ As separation diminishes, so diminishes the ability to discern what constitutes a fundamental of the faith. Consequently, third-order doctrines (e.g., sequence of eschatological events) are raised to the level of first-order doctrines (e.g., bodily resurrection). This error can result in an unhealthy propensity to draw increasingly smaller theological boundaries, an exaggerated eagerness to pigeonhole individuals into specific theological traditions, and a theological rigidity leading to unnecessary disputes.⁵² Developing theological categories does not imply that some doctrines are insignificant or that a person takes biblical truth with less than full seriousness. It implies that a person possesses the ability to discern what doctrines are most foundational to the Christian faith. This practice results in Christians who are able to sift through theological differences with greater wisdom, objectivity, and balance.

Kimball's commitment to historical fundamentalism is beneficial to emerging generational ministry on two fronts. First, theological dogmatism, or more accurately theological hyper-dogmatism and the associated attitude, are damaging Christianity's reputation in emerging culture. Kimball's winsome approach of encouraging appropriate theological exploration, combined with his sensitivities to those attitudes which

⁵¹Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 190-91.

⁵²In an article titled "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," Albert Mohler addresses some of these same concerns and argues for the importance of constructing a "theological triage." Mohler explains that a failure to observe theological priorities can result in what is seen in "American fundamentalism." Mohler writes, "The misjudgment of true fundamentalism is the belief that all disagreements concern first-order doctrines. Thus, third-order issues are raised to a first-order importance, and Christians are wrongly and harmfully divided." Albert Mohler. "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," *AlbertMohler.com* (20 May 2004) [on-line]; accessed 12 May 2011; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2004/05/20/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity-2/>; Internet.

stereotype Christianity, is refreshing. Additionally, theological categorization protects against the danger of presenting lesser doctrines as necessary for salvation. It is understandable and right for churches to promote their positions on second-order and third-order doctrines; however, new believers should understand that disagreement over certain doctrines exists among Christians. Kimball's approach is a healthy reminder for traditional churches to rebuild Christianity's reputation with emerging generations by avoiding legalism and the damaging caricatures associated with fundamentalism.

A second contribution relates to Kimball's identifying the correlation between orthodox theology and authentic Christian living, and their importance in postmodern evangelism. Emerging generations often lack a sense of duty or obligation to any particular faith, let alone church or denomination. Greater consideration is therefore given to a faith community's transformed living, devotional consistency, and manifest goodness.⁵³ Christian orthodoxy, if properly applied in a believer's life, produces a faith marked by genuineness, passion, and holiness. Second Peter 1:5-8 promises that if the Christian is growing in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, he will not be an ineffective minister for Christ. Why does Peter claim that the ministry of the Spirit-filled believer will be effective? It is because orthodoxy that results in orthopraxy attracts, and when Christians live in the Spirit, even skeptical generations notice.⁵⁴

⁵³Kevin DeYoung is right in claiming emerging generations "will not give Christianity a second thought if it seems lifeless, rote, and uninspiring." Kevin DeYoung, "The Secret to Reaching the Next Generation," in *Don't Call it a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day*, ed. Kevin DeYoung, 21-32 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 22.

⁵⁴Exaggerating the importance of authentic living to emerging generations is difficult to do. Mike Yaconelli's *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* speaks to the high value emerging culture places on authenticity. Mike Yaconelli, *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Furthermore, Kimball maintains that conservative theology is appealing to emerging generations because they are inundated by a culture characterized by its surplus of compromise.⁵⁵ Kimball writes,

We can confidently say we have certain fundamental beliefs and that emerging generations are even drawn to our heartfelt and humble explanation of our beliefs. I believe there is a hunger for truth today, and we don't have to be afraid to say that God has revealed truth to us.⁵⁶

Attracting emerging generations with orthodox theology may sound counterintuitive, but Kimball believes fundamentalist Christianity can effectively impact emerging culture.⁵⁷

A third contribution of Kimball's theological approach is its endorsement of a holistic expression of the gospel. Gibbs and Bolger, identifying nine marks of emerging churches, regard "identifying with the life of Jesus" to be one of the stronger commonalities.⁵⁸ Emerging churches, according to Gibbs and Bolger, seek to inaugurate a renewed focus on Jesus' humanity and his hopes for redemption and restoration in the world.⁵⁹ This multi-dimensional understanding of Jesus as God-man, emphasizing that

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 206. D. A. Carson, citing Kimball's ministry as an example, believes emerging churches should be commended for their pursuit of "authentic Christian faith, authentic spirituality, [and] authentic Christian obedience." Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 49, 53.

⁵⁷Orthodox theology draws people, moderns and postmoderns alike, because of its effect on its followers. This hypothesis is defended in Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. Kelley's research determined that theologically conservative churches were growing because their followers were more likely than their liberal counterparts to pursue holy living, not compromise on convictions, evangelize, and discover a meaningful faith. Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study of Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 47, 57-58. Kelley, commissioned by the National Council of Churches, set out to determine why theologically conservative churches were growing, even as the more liberal churches were in decline.

⁵⁸Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2005), 44-45.

⁵⁹Ibid., 54. This renewed focus on Jesus' humanity has led to a level of imbalance among Revisionists who have chosen to emphasize Jesus' incarnation over His exaltation, identifying too much with his humanity.

reality of the kingdom of God in the here and now, yet not dismissing the centrality of the cross, is present in Kimball's theological framework and manifested in his ministry.

Viewing Jesus multi-dimensionally results in multi-dimensional, holistic expression of the gospel that is "not only about heaven and hell, but about serving the world and the Kingdom of God."⁶⁰

Kimball, in concert with leaders across evangelicalism, has rightly critiqued traditional churches' propensity to advocate a reduced gospel by restricting it to a message giving an individual assurance about eternal destiny.⁶¹ Developing this idea, Tony Jones writes, "Too many evangelical churches have emphasized the vertical, just-me-and-Jesus relationship to the exclusion of the horizontal relationship with other human beings and with all of creation."⁶² Kimball, for the greater part of the last decade, has called upon evangelical churches to awaken to their "horizontal" responsibility to love one's neighbor by engaging in societal transformation.

Kimball's contribution to this discussion is two-fold. First, he calls for a holistic expression of the gospel that emphasizes the importance of loving both God and man. Driving this "both-and" emphasis is Kimball's hermeneutical approach that reads the Bible both diachronically (i.e., vertical emphasis stressing personal redemption) and

⁶⁰Dan Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland: Discovering the Beautiful Mess Jesus Loves*, advanced copy edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 224.

⁶¹For critiques from evangelicals, see Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement: Living Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Publishers, 2007), 9. Ed Stetzer, "The Emergent/Emerging Church," 86-87. Carl F. H. Henry exposed this exact same weakness in evangelicalism in his 1947 *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

⁶²Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Joesey-Bass, 2008), 17.

synchronously (i.e., horizontal emphasis stressing creation redemption).⁶³ He recognizes the tension in maintaining a “both-and” emphasis has proven historically difficult for churches navigating this course. Traditional churches, marked by conservative theology, veer toward a personal redemption emphasis to the neglect of creation redemption.⁶⁴ Mainline and Revisionist churches, marked by liberal theology, veer toward a creation redemption emphasis to the neglect of personal redemption. He also understands that “it is easier to focus on justice than it is to focus on evangelism” when ministering in emerging culture because it is “culturally acceptable and applauded to be involved in justice these day.”⁶⁵

Kimball warns churches not to be out of balance due to the cultural tide. The church’s tendency toward imbalance does solicit the question, “How does the church avoid the errors of its predecessors who claimed they would maintain balance yet ultimately failed to do so?” The solution resides in Kimball’s second contribution.

Second, Kimball believes the solution resides in emphasizing both vertical and horizontal aspects of the gospel but giving primary attention to the former.⁶⁶ He deems it to be nonsensical to tend to the temporal needs of humanity without concern for the

⁶³Graeme’s Goldsworthy develops this concept in *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles for Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2007).

⁶⁴Albert Mohler contends that much contemporary preaching lacks a synchronic reading of the Bible and “a loss of the ‘big picture’ of Scripture.” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 19.

⁶⁵Dan Kimball, “Justice Needs Evangelism,” *Outreach*, September/October 2010, 24.

⁶⁶Kimball’s emphasis on gospel proclamation over social justice is similar to what C. Peter Wagner endorsed in his 1981 book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*. Wagner argued the evangelistic mandate and cultural mandate are both essential to the Christian calling, but the former should hold greater emphasis over the latter. Wagner’s position was in alignment with the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, which Kimball endorses. C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (New York City: Harper and Row, 1981).

eternal soul.⁶⁷ Kimball's interpretation of this holistic gospel tension and its expression in the Christian life is helpful for traditional and emerging churches alike.

Adding a caveat to this discussion, as churches rightly seek to develop a holistic expression of the gospel, caution must be exhibited in not minimizing the gospel message that results in personal redemption. Paul's definition of the gospel in 1 Cor 15 is exclusively vertical in nature. Thus, the message of Christ crucified is the gospel. Certainly more could and should be said about the gospel, but a renewed focus on caring for orphans, widows, and the poor should not lessen our emphasis or passion for gospel proclamation. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis provide a helpful statement:

If we do not keep people's eternal plight in mind, then immediate needs will force their way to the top of our agenda, and we will betray the gospel and the people we profess to love. The most loving thing we can do for the poor is to proclaim the good news of eternal salvation through Christ.⁶⁸

A theme flowing through Kimball's theological framework is a desire to repair Christianity's reputation in emerging culture without compromising theological convictions, for the purpose of advancing the gospel.⁶⁹ This truth helps to explain why Kimball is concerned with the dangers of expanding fundamentalism, and why he places a strong emphasis on gospel witness through social justice and mercy ministries. For churches, like VFC, ministering in highly secularized, post-Christian settings, significant energy is devoted to tearing down people's misperceptions of Christianity. The barriers to the gospel these misperceptions create can be hard to appreciate for those living in communities where Judeo-Christian values are still pervasive.

⁶⁷Kimball, "Justice Needs Evangelism," 24.

⁶⁸Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 78.

⁶⁹See Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 233-44.

Christianity is becoming increasingly marginalized in North America. It is therefore becoming all the more paramount that churches not give into sectarian tendencies by retreating from society. Rather, churches must look to impact society with a form of Christianity marked by its commitment to orthodox theology, authentic living, passionate witness, and a concern for creation redemption.

Evangelism

An assessment of Kimball's evangelism uncovers three areas of contribution. First, Kimball's ministry is a healthy demonstration of the important concept of biblical contextualization. The ECM was a response to changing culture; consequently, much of its focus was on contextualizing Christianity and its message in a form comprehensible for emerging culture. Critics of contextualization label it as compromise – a changing of the gospel to please culture – which it can become if not grounded in Scripture. Kimball believes such criticism is often misguided, representing a misunderstanding of contextualization as a biblical principle and as a vital element in effective evangelism.⁷⁰ Tim Keller provides a helpful assessment stating, “Contextualization is not ‘giving people what they want’ but rather it is giving God’s answers (which they may not want!) to questions they are asking and in forms that they can comprehend.”⁷¹ Contextualization,

⁷⁰Dan Kimball, “People Outside the Church are Worth all the Criticism,” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (July 2007) [on-line]; accessed 20 July 2011; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2007/07/people-outside-.html; Internet. Dick Staub, sympathizing with church leaders involved in highly contextualized ministries, articulates the challenge of their position in stating they are “too Christian to the pagans and too pagan to the Christians.” Dick Staub, *Too Christian. Too Pagan: How to Love the World without Falling for It* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

⁷¹Tim Keller, “Contextualization: Wisdom or Compromise?,” *2004 Connect Conference at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri* [on-line]; accessed 12 July 2011; available from http://worldwidefreeresources.com/upload/Keller_Connect2004_Breakout1.mp3; Internet.

driven by the gospel and not felt needs, is then a necessary element in effective communication.

Kimball's contribution is that he has implemented a contextualized ministry in emerging culture and has experienced growth, and more importantly, is biblically grounded. Darrin Patrick labels Kimball's ministry approach as "neo-seeker-sensitive," claiming that it is a more biblically thoughtful version of "seeker-sensitive."⁷²

Kimball, reacting against pragmatism, seeks a more biblically discerned approach. Kimball believes the Bible was shaped by its cultural context, having been written in specific languages within specific historical and cultural settings.⁷³ As Dean Flemming conveys it, "Each book of the New Testament represents an attempt by the author to present the Christian message in a way that is targeted for a particular audience within a given socio-cultural environment."⁷⁴ The same contextualizing freedoms found in Scripture, writes Kimball, are available today as Christians communicate the gospel in emerging culture.⁷⁵ Kimball's reengagement with the missionary/theological concept of contextualization is a philosophy not only helpful, but also necessary for all church forms seeking to engage culture.

⁷²Darrin Patrick, "The History and the Streams of the Emerging Church," *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5262/>; Internet. A general criticism of the seeker-driven movement is that its contextualization was couched in terms of "what works" and did not teach the theological necessity of contextualization.

⁷³Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 175-76.

⁷⁴Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 15.

⁷⁵Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 176. Darrin Patrick provides an evaluation of the emerging church's relationship with contextualization in "A Critique of the Emerging Church – Part One," *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5266/>; Internet.

Cultural engagement does invite risk for churches seeking to navigate the contextualization spectrum whose far ends of disengagement and capitulation are separated by an indefinite distance. Churches must hold tightly to holy distinctiveness while adopting Paul’s philosophy of contextualization:

For thought I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Gregg Allison, recognizing the ECM’s emphasis on contextualization, borrowed Stetzer’s taxonomy terminology – Relevants, Reconstructionists, Revisionists – and placed the movement on the C1-C6 Contextualization Spectrum.⁷⁶ Allison, using the modified abbreviations Cm1 to Cm6, generally positioned Relevants in Cm3, Reconstructionists in Cm4, and Revisionists in Cm5 and Cm6. Allison placed Kimball in the Cm4 category.⁷⁷ Stetzer, providing commentary on Allison’s research, writes,

Those in this category [Cm4] are deconstructing and reconstructing in postmodern culture, being careful in most cases to use only biblically permissible forms. Many conservative Evangelical mission agencies (including the International Mission Board) view Cm4 as the limit of contextualization.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Gregg Allison, “An Evaluation of Emerging Churches on the Basis of the Contextualization Spectrum (C1-C6),” presented to the Evangelical Theological Society (17 November 2006) [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2011; available from http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/gregg_allison_2006-11-17_an_evaluation_of_emerging_churches_on_the_basis_of_the_contextualization_spectrum.pdf; Internet. The abbreviations of the C1-C6 were modified to Cm1-Cm6 by Allison to reflect the application to the British and North American contexts. “M” represents “modified.” Ibid., 3

⁷⁷Ibid., 9.

⁷⁸Ed Stetzer, “The Emerging/Emergent Church,” in *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent: A Discussion on the Emergent Church Movement*, ed. William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway, 47-90 (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009), 83.

Allison's categorization of Kimball's ministry at VFC places it at the far end of the spectrum for what is considered theologically acceptable. This categorization is appropriate considering Kimball's culturally responsive, yet biblical, methodological approach.⁷⁹

The explicit danger of contextualization is over-contextualization. Since contextualization is an important element in emerging generational ministry, Kimball provides pastors the following exhortation as they seek to engage culture in a theologically thoughtful manner:

Always remember that methodology flows from theology... not vice versa. I hope we will constantly be thinking through the reasons we do what we do and what theological roots support our church practice. I can no longer teach anything or use a form of media or launch a new program without thinking through the theological meaning behind it and what it communicates theologically. As a pastor, I want to be creating a culture of theological thinking within the people of the church. I try my best to constantly be explaining the theological 'why's' behind whatever we are doing in the church.⁸⁰

A second contribution is Kimball's advancement of a new model for attractional evangelism. The modern church's attractional model is caricatured as the "invite-and-come-see" approach where churches orchestrate events (e.g., Christmas musical, Easter play, celebrity guest speaker events) in order to "attract" non-Christians. A pastor often presents the gospel to insure attendees have heard the truth.⁸¹ Personal evangelism is often reduced to inviting non-Christians to Christian activities rather than sharing the gospel.

⁷⁹Kimball, "Humble Theology, 222.

⁸⁰Ibid., 222-23.

⁸¹Woven throughout *Adventures in Churchland* is a retelling of an awkward encounter Kimball had with a Christmas musical. Kimball contends that to emerging generations musicals and plays often provide "very weird and confusing expressions of the church and Christianity." Dan Kimball, *Adventures in Churchland*, 24.

Kimball is right to question the effectiveness of the modern church's attractional model when research reveals only 12 percent of North American churches are currently growing and only three percent qualify as evangelistically healthy.⁸² This approach's impact is becoming increasingly marginalized because the church is viewed with a growing irrelevance. It raises the question, "Who would want to come see something irrelevant?"⁸³

Kimball advocates a new attractional model that promotes reengagement of culture and the attracting of non-Christians to the church primarily through personal relationships and the fellowship of believers.⁸⁴ Kimball does not espouse elaborate strategies, but rather a return to basics. First, Christians need to foster non-Christian friendships. Kimball writes, "If people are to trust us in order to ask us for the hope we

⁸²Research reveals that 40,000 of the 340,000 churches surveyed are growing. Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 79. Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer write, "Of the estimated 400,000 U.S. churches, only 3.5% are effective evangelistically, meaning that fewer than four churches out of 100 maintain a conversion ratio of 20:1 or better. When you consider that the nation's population is now 300 million, if only 3.5% of churches are healthy in the area of evangelism, then there's only one healthy evangelistic church for every 21,400 persons in the United States!" Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, "Wanted: More Evangelistic Churches," 16.

⁸³Barna research reveals 72 percent of 16 to 29 year-olds view Christianity as "out of touch with reality." David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 28. According to Kimball, the perceived irrelevance of the traditional church is partially tied to the conscious or subconscious decision of many Christians to disengage culture, thus separating themselves from those they were called to reach. New believers are more likely to feel this tension. Rightly immersing themselves in the church, they form new friendships and become increasingly disconnected from their former non-Christian relationships. As this process occurs again and again, it creates an inwardly focused church with an ever decreasing sphere of community influence. Kimball refers to this process as the "the transformation from excited missionary into citizen of the bubble." Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 41-43. Describing the propensity for congregations to become increasingly inward focused, Charles Arn writes, "The longer a congregation exists, the more concerned it tends to become with self-preservation – and the less concerned with its original purpose. Time, money, staff, and even the prayers become increasingly inward-focused. The result, not surprisingly, is that the church stops growing." Charles Arn, "The Top Five Church Growth Principles," *Rev.Org* [on-line]; accessed 2 September 2011; available from <http://www.rev.org/article.asp?ID=3292>; Internet.

⁸⁴Kimball's commitment to cultural engagement is evidenced by the intentional planting of VFC in Santa Cruz's downtown area and in near proximity to the University of California – Santa Cruz. Josh Fox, VFC's Worship Pastor, discusses this decision in an interview. "Eric Bryant's Interview of Josh Fox," *Origins* (July 2010) [on-line]; accessed 17 March 2011; available from <http://www.ericbryant.org/audio/NotLikeMe-Fox.mp3>; Internet.

have, we must spend time with them and build relationships.”⁸⁵ This idea of “relationship evangelism” is certainly not avant-garde. Developing relationships was also an essential component of modernistic evangelism strategies. In fact, many of Kimball’s practices are not original and are practiced by many traditional churches.

Second, Christians need to pray for their non-Christian friends and trust the Spirit of God is still alive and active.⁸⁶ Kimball confesses to a level of embarrassment in the elementary nature of this step, but it is often neglected in churches’ evangelism strategies.

Third, as relationships develop, believers must invite people into Christian community. Inviting non-Christians into community is more evangelistically effective in emerging culture because today’s generation is more likely to allow their experiences to influence their beliefs.⁸⁷ It is within the context of Christian community that unbelievers experience the church and come to faith.⁸⁸

The value of Kimball’s approach is that the evangelistic onus is placed on the individual believer. The crux of the church’s missional effort is not entrusted to a specific

⁸⁵ Kimball describes his new attractional approach in “A Different Kind of Apologist,” *Apologetics for a New Generation*, ed. Sean McDowell, 29-40 (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2009), 33.

⁸⁶Ibid., 33-34.

⁸⁷According to Kimball, in modernity facts influence belief; belief then influences behavior. In postmodernity, experience influences behavior; behavior then influences belief. Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 187.

⁸⁸The evangelism model practiced at VFC is replicated in recent evangelical writings. Kevin DeYoung’s evangelism strategy in *Don’t Call it a Comeback* is similarly patterned, placing emphasis on Spirit-filled authentic living, developing conversations, prayer, and not dumbing down or hiding truth. Kevin DeYoung, “The Secret to Reaching the Next Generation,” in *Don’t Call it a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day*, ed. Kevin DeYoung, 21-32 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). Kimball and DeYoung’s models do break pattern regarding inviting non-Christians into biblical community for the purposes of experience leading to faith. This practice is appropriate if monitored. The danger is it can result in non-Christians enjoying the benefit of Christian community without converting to Christianity – leading to a false assurance grounded in what Carson calls “belonging” without “becoming.” Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 146.

ministry or the attractability of special services or entertainment-based activities.

Cultivating an evangelism approach centered on the believer's witness and the testimony of the Christian community is not only biblical, it is also reproducible for all churches independent of size, budget, available resources, and location.

A third contribution of Kimball's evangelism approach is its promotion of every Christian a missionary – a concept fundamental to the success of Kimball's attractional evangelism approach. Similar to the training provided for international missionaries by mission agencies, Kimball believes churches have a responsibility to equip believers to effectively engage emerging culture with the gospel. He writes,

For the last fifteen to seventeen hundred years the church has been at the center of society. Today that has changed. The church is becoming more marginalized and even seen in a negative light by many in our emerging culture. This means the church must get outside the walls again to be the salt and light of Jesus to the people in our communities, not just to each other. This means every Christian is a missionary, and thus our church is a missional community or a missional church. This is not new, innovative thinking – this is exactly the aim of the early vintage church.⁸⁹

Kimball is right in his encouraging churches to take ownership in training their members to think in terms of the mission field being places of work, residency, and leisure.

Kimball's expectation for VFC to train members as missionaries and for members to commit to be missionaries is explicitly laid out in the church's new member material. VFC and its members enter into the following covenantal agreement.⁹⁰ The first three covenants communicate the church's covenant to its members:

1. We covenant to continually view the church itself as a mission, not as a church that has a "missions department". We will always encourage our community to be outward-focused, to deeply love the world that Jesus loves.

⁸⁹"Section Five: Missional," *Vintage Faith Church New Members Class Materials*, 1.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

2. We covenant to train, support and encourage every person who is part of Vintage Faith Church to live as missionaries, ambassadors and priests in their everyday contexts.
3. We covenant to lead the church to care for the needs of the oppressed and marginalized.

These five covenants communicate the member's commitment to the mission of the church:

1. I covenant to recognize daily that I don't go to church but that I am the church, sent out to see others' lives transformed to live for Jesus (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
2. I covenant to live a life that will represent Jesus to the world around me in a way he would be pleased with (despite the inherent, messy flaws I have as a human being), remaining pure and holy, yet never disconnected from the culture around me (John 17:15; Matt 5:13-16; 2 Cor 2:15).
3. I covenant to regularly and intentionally cultivate relationships with and actively pray for people who do not yet know and follow Jesus, that they could experience the kingdom of God here on earth and in eternity (Col 4:2-6).
4. I covenant to seek out opportunities to connect and invite my non-Christian friends into my Christian community (Matt 9:9-10; John 4:28-29).
5. I covenant to support the vision of seeing all people in all parts of the world be reconciled to God through the saving power of Jesus; as well as to meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the marginalized and oppressed (Matt 5:13-16; Isa 58:6-7; Jas 1:27).

VFC's covenant demonstrates two certainties. First, VFC has given in-depth biblical consideration to its missional philosophy and understanding of the church's central role in the *missio Dei*.⁹¹ Second, VFC is committed to being a missional force in its community and in the world on both the individual and corporate church-wide level.

⁹¹Kimball believes the church is the primary agent of God's change in the world. The VFC new member class materials address the church's central role in the *missio Dei*. "Section One: Introduction to Church and Mission," *Vintage Faith New Members Class Materials*, 7. Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in Pluralistic Society* and other writings have played a significant role in shaping Relevants' understanding of the church's role in the *mission Dei*. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989). See Patrick, "A Critique of the Emerging Church – Part One."

Kimball's now decade-old concept of viewing missionary work as both local and global is one of his more significant contributions to emerging generational ministry, and the idea is spreading to traditional church circles. In 2007, SBC President Frank Page asked Stetzer to "bring a charge" at the SBC Annual Meeting on how to reach North America for Christ. Stetzer responded, "We must never think that reaching America is so different than reaching the world.... North America must be treated like a mission field. We have to break down the extra-biblical notion that evangelism and missions are two separate things."⁹² Cultural expert Nancy Pearson agrees, stating, "Christians are called to adopt the mentality of a missionary, even if they never set foot in a foreign country."⁹³

Today's rapidly changing culture means missionary work happens at the ends of the earth and at the end of the cul-de-sac. Developing a missionary mentality is also increasingly necessary with the planet's growing transit nature. It is without exaggeration to say the nations have come to the United States, resulting in changes in strategy for how mission agencies and churches evangelize people groups.⁹⁴

⁹²Chris Turner, "Live Like a Missionary – Stetzer Urges," *Baptist Press* (15 June 2007); accessed 28 July 2011; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=25896>; Internet.

⁹³Nancy Pearson, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Minds, Morals, and Meanings* (Nashville: B & H Publishing), 270.

⁹⁴The SBC is recognizing the need to rethink mission strategies in light of the planet's growing transient nature. Following the 2011 SBC Annual Meeting, Erich Bridges, an IMB global correspondent, wrote an article describing the necessity of a growing partnership between the SBC's two mission boards (IMB and NAMB). In order to respond to the "world rushing into the United States" and the "584 unengaged, unreached people groups in North America," Bridges writes, "National borders no longer define the task of missions in a globalized world marked by the rapid migrations of people groups in need of the Gospel." In the article, Bridges interviewed Aaron Coe, NAMB's vice president for mobilization. Coe said, "We're no longer training people here in America just to engage people group overseas; we're training people to engage people groups here in America and overseas." Erich Bridges, "NAMB and IMB Partnership to Transcend National, Geographic Boards," *North American Mission Board* (1 July 2011) [online]; accessed 5 September 2011; available from <http://www.namb.net/nambblog1.aspx?id=8590116839&blogid=8589939695>; Internet.

The promotion of missional living represents the most significant area of contribution in Kimball's ministry. Kimball's thoughts on biblical contextualization, an attractional evangelism rooted in personal evangelism, and the concept of every Christian a missionary embody some of the best insights that came out of the ECM. Each denotes a valuable insight deserving consideration by traditional churches.

Discipleship

As stated in this chapter's critique section, discipleship strategies for emerging generational ministry solicit less change than other areas of methodology. Therefore, to a greater degree, a healthy discipleship model will possess similar elements regardless of cultural setting. Despite greater similarity, Kimball's discipleship methodology still contains contributions helpful as churches think through how to train and equip congregates. This section will highlight two contributions emerging from Kimball's approach.

The first contribution is Kimball's emphasis on intergenerational connectedness. VFC's demonstrates its commitment to intergenerational connectedness in its identifying it as one of its core values.⁹⁵ The lack, but not absence of, older generations is an observable concern for VFC, as it is for many emerging churches.⁹⁶ This void has rightly resulted in a greater acknowledgment and effort to develop

⁹⁵“Vintage Faith is Multi-Generational – Comprised of Individuals and Families,” *Vintage Faith* [on-line]; accessed 23 June 2011; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/vision/multi-generational/>; Internet.

⁹⁶Darrin Patrick identifies that lack of older believers in emerging churches as a major concern. According to Patrick, the ECM's reputation for being “arrogance” and “dumb” is partially attributed to the lack of mature believers within these congregations. Darrin Patrick, “A Critique of Emerging Churches – Part Two,” *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5267/>; Internet.

intergenerational connectedness.⁹⁷ Many traditional churches, structuring their ministries by age, have unintentionally inhibited the dynamics of biblical community through age segregation. VFC's family-based ministry model, maintaining age-graded ministries while creatively and intentionally encouraging intergenerational connectedness, provides a balanced approach.

The second contribution is Kimball's emphasis on creating "spiritual self-feeders" instead of "spiritual consumers."⁹⁸ It is easy for Christians to believe two fallacies. The first is that the church is solely responsible to care for individuals and families' spiritual well-being. Kimball is concerned individuals and parents are too dependent upon the church for spiritual food. He believes churches have a duty to create a culture where spiritual feeding is expected to occur outside the church walls.

The second fallacy is Sundays alone are for recharging the "spiritual battery." Developing this idea, Kimball builds off the work of Dallas Willard. Willard writes,

We must flatly say that one of the greatest contemporary barriers of meaningful spiritual formation in Christ-likeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of 'regular church services,' of whatever kind they may be. Though they are vital, they are not enough. It is that simple.⁹⁹

Kimball challenges VFC's members to assume responsibility for their own spiritual health and not outsource it to another person or program (e.g., pastors, worship services).

⁹⁷See pages 129-30 for a description for how VFC encourages intergenerational connectedness.

⁹⁸Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 222. VFC's new member material contains a section titled "Creating a Culture of Self-feeders." Members are asked to agree to the following covenantal statement: I covenant to take responsibility for my own theological growth (and my children's, if I am a parent) and to "feeding myself" from the Scriptures during the week so that I will worship God more holistically as I understand more about who He is (Hebrews 5:12-14, Acts 17:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-9)." "Section Six: Theologians," 5.

⁹⁹Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2002), 241.

Regarding families, Kimball exhorts parents to follow the advice of Deut 6:7 in teaching God’s Word diligently to their children.

In recent years, the concepts of intergenerational connectedness and the importance of personal responsibility in spiritually feeding oneself and one’s family have gained traction in evangelical writings – a reality that speaks to Kimball’s insightfulness. *Family Driven Faith*, *Shift*, *A Parent Privilege*, and *Collaborate: Family + Church* are books published since 2007 that have emphasized these ideas.¹⁰⁰ Kimball’s discipleship methodology is not innovative per se, but it constitutes an endorsable model that highlights several areas of discipleship where the traditional church has demonstrated weakness.

Worship

An evaluation of Kimball’s worship methodology reveals two areas of contribution. The first contribution is that Kimball’s approach to worship is biblically grounded while at the same time exhibiting a proper balance in its commitment to historical traditions and contemporary contextualization. The changing pace of culture makes it difficult to maintain a dynamic worship service that is simultaneously countercultural and culturally relevant. Keller, responding to this challenge, writes, “I believe the solution to the problem of the ‘worship wars’ is neither to reject nor to enshrine historical tradition but to forge new forms of corporate worship that take

¹⁰⁰Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). Brian Haynes, *Shift: What it Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishers, 2009). Steve Wright, *A Parent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Ministries, Inc., 2008). *Collaborate: Family + Church*, ed. Michael Chanley (Louisville, KY: Ministers Label Publishing, 2010).

seriously both our histories and contemporary realities, all within a framework of biblical theology.”¹⁰¹

Keller is correct that worship should be biblical while striving to incorporate both historical traditions and the influence of contemporary culture. Kimball’s emerging worship reflects Keller’s philosophy and represents a valuable paradigm for churches seeking to maintain biblical fidelity and connect with emerging generations.

First, Kimball’s approach is committed to biblical fidelity. The eight Scripture-saturated guidelines that govern his approach provide a biblical parameter appropriate for all worship styles in all church models.¹⁰² Michael Lawrence and Mark Dever commend Kimball’s devotion to biblical worship.

From [Kimball’s] recognition of what constitutes the essential elements of public worship (preaching, praying, singing, sacraments, Scripture), to his statement that the Bible does not tell us what a worship service should look like, to his sound biblical-theological insight that church is the people, not the building, to his fine pastoral concern that corporate worship flow from transformed lives (and we could extend the list), Kimball demonstrates a clear and accurate grasp of the Bible’s teaching on worship.¹⁰³

Second, Kimball’s approach is committed to historical traditions, believing Christian worship “should honor the past and historical expressions of worship.”¹⁰⁴ To that end, VFC is committed to worshipping through singing hymns and reading both ancient prayers and historical Christian confessional statements. Such practices are not

¹⁰¹Tim Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson, 193-250 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 198.

¹⁰²See pages 135-36 for a list of the eight guidelines.

¹⁰³Michael Lawrence and Mark Dever, “Responses to Dan Kimball,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson, 348-52 (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2009), 348. While complementary of the biblical thoughtfulness undergirding Kimball’s emerging worship, Lawrence and Dever do express some concern in Kimball’s approach possessing a level of susceptibility to over-contextualization. *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁰⁴Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” 299.

only beneficial in implanting theological richness into the worship gathering, but they also assist believers in identifying with the deep historical roots of Christianity.

Third, Kimball's approach is committed to appropriate cultural contextualization. As emerging worship strives to grow backward by embracing historical traditions, it also seeks to reach forward by incarnating Christian worship into culture so, as Keller states, "'receptor-hearers' can understand."¹⁰⁵ All worship is contextualized because "no truth which human beings may articulate can ever be articulated in a culture-transcending way."¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the question of contextualization is not whether it should occur, but to what degree. Kimball's emerging worship calls for a level of contextualization that appropriately aligns with a church's specific community.¹⁰⁷

Kimball's emerging worship represents a sincere attempt to avoid the irrelevance sometimes associated with traditional worship and the theological dearth sometimes associated with contemporary worship. This approach strives for relevance through media, popular music styles, and teaching series and forums addressing culturally pertinent issues.¹⁰⁸ It also infuses theological richness through hymns and

¹⁰⁵Keller, "Contextualization: Wisdom or Compromise?," 1.

¹⁰⁶D. A. Carson, "Maintaining Scientific and Christian Truths in a Postmodern World," *Science & Christian Belief*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (October 2002), 107-122 [on-line]; accessed 20 July 2011; available from <http://www.scienceandchristianbelief.org/articles/carson.pdf>; Internet.

¹⁰⁷Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 61-62. Kimball acknowledges that North American churches are ministering in a time of transition between the modern and postmodern eras. For this reason, different forms of the church (i.e., modern churches, emerging churches, and churches integrating elements from both models) are necessary.

¹⁰⁸An example of Kimball's desire to be relevant is seen in an annual teaching series titled "Q5: Questions of Theology and Culture." Congregants submit questions and Kimball responds to them in his sermons. Kimball's sermons are followed by panel discussions and forums addressing the specific topic of that day. "Q-5: Questions of Theology and Culture – New Series at Vintage Faith Church," *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (October 2010) [on-line]; accessed 1 February 2011; available from http://www.dan.kimball.com/vintage_faith/2010/10/q-5-questions-of-theology-and-culture-new-series-at-vintage-faith-church.html; Internet.

readings of Scripture, prayers, and creeds. The concept of multisensory worship, if used properly and in moderation, as Kimball suggests, can help to invigorate a worship service.¹⁰⁹

A second contribution is Kimball's reengaging art in Christian worship. Traditional churches, shaped by modernism's bent toward absolutes and even scientific spirit, have largely neglected the arts.¹¹⁰ As modernism's influence spread throughout Western culture and Christendom, it resulted in a de-emphasis of Christianity's mystical aspects (e.g., Trinity, miraculous events, spiritual realm, afterlife).¹¹¹ Modernism's lasting impact, according to Darrin Patrick, is still evidenced by the fact today's "churches have almost entirely given the arts up to the world."¹¹² VFC is one of many emerging churches reengaging the arts, and the artisan subculture.

Churches should examine the benefit of introducing or enhancing its art emphasis for three reasons. First, artistic expression represents a means of worship. The Christian demonstrates an act of worship in creating divinely inspired art. According to C. S. Lewis, proceeding from the minds and hands of Christians should be the world's "greatest artistic works" because they "have been made by men and women who valued

¹⁰⁹For Kimball's comments on appropriate usage of multisensory components, see Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 151; Kimball and Lewin, *Sacred Space*, 35.

¹¹⁰Nancy Pearcey, explaining modernism's impact of Christianity and culture, writes, "Over time, however, a secular approach began to crowd out the biblical worldview. The stunning new scientific theories were co-opted by Enlightenment ideologues who stripped them of their Christian context. A biblically informed respect for empirical facts, which had inspired science to begin with, was replaced by empiricism, a philosophy that elevates the senses to the sole source of truth. Whatever could not be known by empirical methods was rejected as myth or metaphor." Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo*, 108.

¹¹¹Pearcey illustrates this transition through Francisco Goya's rendering of Miguel Gambornio's *Assassination of Five Monks from Valencia*. The piece depicts the execution of a Christian martyr. Goya's rendition removes "the heavens opening and angel preparing the martyr's crown," and replaces it with a church in the shadows, "which implies that Christianity has no answers." *Ibid.*, 108-09.

¹¹²Patrick, "A Critique of the Emerging Church – Part One."

something else more than their art.”¹¹³ Second, expressions of art can be used to visually enhance a worship gathering – resulting in deeper spiritual engagement.¹¹⁴

Third, art can be leveraged for the purposes of evangelism.¹¹⁵ Art provides an avenue to infuse Christian ideology into culture. Patrick writes, “The best art in the world should come out of the church because Christian art is an absolute missional enterprise in its giving to people a taste of a world to come.”¹¹⁶ VFC utilizes several different means for engaging Santa Cruz’s artisans.

First, the Abbey serves as a venue to exhibit local musical and art talent.¹¹⁷ Second, VFC uses its building to host art installments that display pieces from church members and local artists.¹¹⁸ Third, VFC puts on an annual Easter outreach event called

¹¹³C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Literature,” *Genesis: Journal of the Society of Christians in the Arts, Inc.*, 1, no. 2 (1975), 22. Jerram Barrs’ article “Christianity and the Arts” addresses the value of utilizing art as a means of Christian worship. Jerram Barrs, “Christianity and the Arts,” *Covenant Theological Seminary’s Francis Schaeffer Institute* (2009); accessed 20 July 2011; available from http://www.davidson.ruf.org/site_content/attachments/0000/2449/Barrs_ChristianityAndTheArts.pdf; Internet.

¹¹⁴Kimball develops this ideal in “Emerging Worship,” 323-24.

¹¹⁵Carson, citing Kimball specifically, praises emerging churches for their intentionality in extending the church’s witness to “people who are often overlooked by the church. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 52-53.

¹¹⁶Darrin Patrick, “A Critique of the Emerging Church – Part Three,” *Fall 2007 Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures* [on-line], accessed 24 November 2007, available from <http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/5267/>; Internet. Patrick builds off the work of Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper writes, “But if you confess that the world once was beautiful, but by the curse has become undone, and by a final catastrophe is to pass to its state of full glory excelling even the beautiful of paradise, then art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming luster.” Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1931), 155.

¹¹⁷According to one reviewer’s website, The Abbey has become a “hot spot” for students and faculty of the University of California – Santa Cruz. “The Abbey – Santa Cruz,” *Yelp: Real People. Real Reviews.* [on-line]; accessed 9 September 2011; available from <http://www.yelp.com/biz/the-abbey-santa-cruz>; Internet.

¹¹⁸The Gallery, an SBC church strategically located in the Manhattan’s Chelsea district, is like a growing number of churches utilizing its facilities to double as an art gallery. The leveraging of art, according to Pastor Freddy T. Wyatt, is an essential component of The Gallery’s evangelistic strategy, and much of the church’s fruit is a direct result of art engagement. Freddy T. Wyatt, email to author, 2 August 2011.

“Stations of the Cross.” VFC gathers art created by local artist and sets up an exhibit on the streets of downtown Santa Cruz. The exhibit consists of twelve stations that chronologically tell the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Onlookers are given a guide that explains the meaning of each station.¹¹⁹ Santa Cruz is an art enthusiastic community; therefore, VFC’s use of art in evangelism and worship is going to be greater than what would be appropriate for most churches. That understood, all churches should consider how to engage art subculture creatively through missional endeavors.

Kimball’s emerging worship stresses elements of worship that all churches should implement regardless of postmodernism’s influence. VFC’s commitment to the reading of Scripture and ancient prayers corporately and to the singing of theologically robust hymns are good practices for all churches. A temptation exists for churches to confuse tradition with what is biblical. Kimball’s approach challenges churches to decipher what worship practices are rooted in Scripture and must remain, and what practices are rooted in tradition and are issues of preference.

Preaching

Kimball’s preaching provides a positive model for emerging generational ministry. His “theotopical” homiletical approach, mixing expository and topical preaching, is effective in communicating the “theological concept” of a specific text and “how it fits into the story of the Bible.”¹²⁰ Kimball’s exposition is important for

¹¹⁹Audrey Barrick, “Churches Convey Passion of Christ through Art,” (10 April 2009) [online]; accessed 8 September 2011; available from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/churches-convey-passion-of-christ-through-art-twitter-38010/>; Internet.

¹²⁰Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 180.

grounding listeners in the text, and his emphasis on the scriptural storyline is all the more valuable in light of emerging generation's lack of biblical knowledge.

Examining the landscape of postmodern preaching, Albert Mohler contends postmodern preaching “suffers from an emptying of biblical content” and too great “a focus on felt needs.”¹²¹ Kimball agrees, claiming his own approach is a reaction to biblically anemic “felt-need” preaching.¹²² Belcher, referring to Kimball's preaching as “filled with Scripture” after a visit to VFC, says “The traditional church might be shocked at how conservative Dan's teaching is. He spent a full twenty minutes of the sermon expositing Romans 1.”¹²³

Kimball understands the importance of biblically centered preaching in emerging culture. Absolute truths must to proclaimed and preached all the more, claims Kimball, for “the trustworthiness of Scripture” is “refreshing to emerging generations, floating in relativism.”¹²⁴ Kimball states that in recent years he has felt a greater responsibility to preach deep doctrinal truth.¹²⁵ Illustrating this greater commitment, in the fall of 2011, Kimball preached a 13-week series entitled “Vintage Faith: Core Beliefs

¹²¹Mohler, *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 19.

¹²²Michael Dudit, Dan Kimball, “Preaching in the Emerging Church: An Interview with Dan Kimball,” *Preaching*, interview by Michael Dudit [on-line], accessed online 2 February 2011, available from <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11549470/>; Internet.

¹²³Belcher, *Deep Church*, 128. Belcher credited Kimball for his clear gospel presentation and emphasis on Jesus as the only way to God and salvation.

¹²⁴Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 172, 182. Kimball's preaching does not avoid “un-emerging” themes such as sin, repentance, judgment – as illustrated in a recent sermon he preached from the book of Jonah. Kimball told his audience that he is committed to teaching on hell more than ever. Discussing the coming judgment, he said, “Our hearts should be so broken by the horrible reality of an eternity apart from God that our listeners can easily sense our compassion as we speak about it.” Dan Kimball, “Reflecting Christ's Compassion,” *Imago Dei Community Church* (10 October 2010) [on-line], accessed 17 June 2011, available from <http://www.imagodeicommunity.com/sunday/sermon-archive/preacher/dan-kimball/>; Internet.

¹²⁵Kimball, email, 12 April 2011.

of Historical Christianity.”¹²⁶ Kimball used this opportunity to teach systematically through core doctrines, an approach he had not previously used.

An evaluation of Kimball’s preaching reveals that his most significant contribution may very well take place outside the pulpit. Kimball’s philosophy of preaching places a heightened importance on the person of the preacher.¹²⁷ Emerging church leaders often critique their counterparts in traditional churches for their unwillingness to be honest regarding personal struggles.¹²⁸ This inhibition against appropriate disclosure is often present in and out of the pulpit. Kimball writes,

Our lives will preach better than anything we can say. When we preach, our attitudes will speak more loudly than our words. Our little comments about our opinions on issues will surely be remembered more than our message outlines (Col. 4:6). May we never abuse our privilege as a preacher or teacher by spouting off about our personal preferences or by pointing fingers in an un-Christlike way. There will be a great backlash from emerging generations if they sense loftiness or arrogance. The fact that our hearts are broken over those who don’t know Jesus will preach far more loudly than our words. Our admissions of our failures and joys as disciples of Jesus will carry much weight. People in emerging generations look at our hearts more than the words we speak. Never underestimate this.¹²⁹

This contribution speaks more to Christian living than preaching methodology; nonetheless, Kimball considers authentic living to be a vital element to his preaching

¹²⁶Dan Kimball, “Theology and Doctrine Series at Vintage Faith.” *Dan Kimball – Vintage Faith* (August 2011) [on-line]; accessed 3 September 2011; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2011/08/theology-and-doctrine-series-at-vintage-faith-church-yes-even-systematic-theology.html#comment_6a00d83453083969e2014e8b5279b3970d; Internet.

¹²⁷In *The Emerging Church*, Kimball writes two chapters related to preaching in the emerging church. One chapter is entirely committed to describing the importance of preachers “preaching without words.” Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 171-96.

¹²⁸Patrick challenges pastors to be transparent and not to put up a pseudo of perfection because it is obvious to anyone in their congregation they are not. Patrick, “A Critique of Emerging Churches – Part Two.”

¹²⁹Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 194-95.

effectiveness. Personal holiness and transparency in the preacher's life should not be overlooked for their prime importance in emerging generational ministry.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to evaluate Kimball's ministry to emerging generations. Kimball's ministry, like every ministry, has both positive and negative elements. Kimball's positive contributions seem to far outweigh the negative aspects of his ministry. For churches in communities experiencing significant postmodern influence, he provides a model for how to effectively lead a congregation to biblical fidelity while at the same time understandable to the postmodern environment. For churches in communities where postmodernism's influence is growing but not pervasive, Kimball's ministry provides insight into the types of adjustments churches are making to effectively impact emerging culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This dissertation has sought to demonstrate that Dan Kimball’s ministry provides contributing insight for churches engaging in emerging generational ministry. Attention has been given to those elements of his ministry indispensable to his ministry approach. In concluding this study, this chapter provides a summary of Kimball’s ministry, a proposal for further study in four particular areas, and a final personal word.

Summary of Kimball’s Ministry

Despite his less than ten years of ministry experience, Kimball’s innovation and leadership in emerging generational ministry garnered attention during the mid-1990s.¹ Leadership Network and Youth Specialties, two organizations intent on advancing Christian ministry to younger generations, identified Kimball’s ministry as yielding valuable ideas for youth and young adult ministry. Following the advice of Zondervan Publishing House, Kimball articulated these ideas in the award-winning *The Emerging Church* – the book credited for popularizing “emerging” terminology within

¹Kimball started speaking at regional conferences as an authority on ministry to younger generations in 1996. Kimball’s ministry received national recognition once he began speaking at Leadership Network conferences in 1997. Dan Kimball, telephone interview with author, 10 May 2010.

broader evangelicalism.² Kimball's inaugural book established his credentials as an innovative thinker and solidified his position as a leader in the ECM.

Emerging church leaders, discontent with the ecclesiological shape of the North American church, attempted to establish churches marked by authenticity, community, mission, and culture.³ These values resonated with Kimball, thus drawing him into the "emerging conversation." Unfortunately, the movement's identity became increasingly indistinguishable and associated with the theologically liberal Emergent Village. Theological disputes tarnished the movement's reputation, resulting in Kimball's departure from it and subsequent focus on missional Christianity. Illustrating this transition in Kimball's ministry are his role in the framing of the Missional Manifesto and involvement in Origins – an evangelical network of Christian leaders resembling its theologically liberal counterpart Emergent Village.

Following fifteen years of fruitful youth and young adult ministry at SCBC, Kimball helped plant VFC with 175 core members in 2004. VFC, whose average worship attendance has grown to approximately 875, is a vibrant church strategically located in the heart of downtown Santa Cruz.⁴ According to Scot McKnight, VFC is the "centrist

²Mark Ostreicher, interview conducted by author, 22 March 2011. *The Emerging Church* not only received a book of the year award in the category of church/pastoral leadership from *Christianity Today*, Andrew Jones and Scot McKnight list it as one of the top five books on the ECM. Scot McKnight, "My Top Five Books on the Emerging Movement," *Christianity Today* (6 October 2009) [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2011; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/october/20.64.html>; Internet. Andrew Jones, "The 50 Books on My Emerging Church Bookshelf," *Tall Skinny Kiwi* (14 June 2006) [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2011; available from http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/06/the_50_books_on.html; Internet.

³Mark Devine makes this assertion in "The Emerging Church: One Movement – Two Streams," in *Evangelical Engaging Emergent*, ed. William Henard and Adam Greenway, 4-46 (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009), 4-6.

⁴Dan Kimball, email to author, 29 August 2011.

expression of the ECM in the United States”); consequently, it corresponds that Kimball’s ministry at VFC would embody some of the movement’s strengths and weaknesses.⁵

Kimball’s ministry, as with any ministry model, evidences discernable strengths and weaknesses. The most prominent positive contributions Kimball made to emerging generational ministry are summarized in the following five ideas: his promotion of biblical contextualization, his emphasis on a holistic expression of the gospel in fulfilling the Christian’s evangelistic and cultural mandates, his promotion of every Christian as a missionary, his advocacy of a biblical, historical, and contextualized expression of worship, and his leveraging the arts for enhancing worship and evangelism.

Kimball’s most prominent weaknesses and thus where he is not a model for emerging generational ministry can be summarized in the following four ideas: his theological imprecision on doctrinal issues considered secondary or tertiary in nature, his tendency to lack forthrightness when addressing contentious issues, his emerging worship’s vulnerability to experientialism and the practical challenges surrounding its implementation, his failure to monitor the health of VFC through gathering statistical information. In summation, an overall assessment of Kimball’s ministry reveals it to be a generally healthy and overall positive model for ministry in emerging culture.

Areas for Further Study

This dissertation, seeking to ascertain Kimball’s contribution to emerging generational ministry, examined Kimball’s beliefs on fundamental Christian doctrines

⁵Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key Elements of the most Controversial and Misunderstood Movement in the Church Today,” *Christianity Today* (19 January 2007) [on-line]; accessed 9 February 2011; available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=40534; Internet.

and his methodological approaches to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching. This research also revealed areas in need of further study. Further research should concentrate, but not be limited to, the following four areas.

First, further research should explore the long term growth patterns of VFC as a means of evaluating church health and ministry model effectiveness. A limitation of this study is that VFC has not historically kept statistical information regarding worship attendance, small group attendance, and baptismal numbers. Due to VFC's recent decision to record worship and small group attendance, statistical research is a future possibility.

Second, further research should concentrate on Kimball's philosophy of leadership – a topic he commits a chapter to in *The Emerging Church*.⁶ A specific area necessitating further investigation is how emerging culture's cautious demeanor toward authority impacts pastoral leadership in the local church. Kimball suggests that authoritative power in emerging churches should be diffused, as opposed to concentrated.⁷ The implications of Kimball's suggestion on pastoral authority need further exploration.

Third, Kimball's theology and convictions relating to the role of women in ministry need further study – particularly in light of his claim that it “is a major issue” in emerging churches.⁸ Worth investigating is Kimball's claim that emerging generations are not overly concerned with whether a church holds a complementarian or egalitarian

⁶Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 227-42.

⁷Ibid., 228-29.

⁸Dan Kimball, “Emerging Worship,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: B & H Publishers, 2009), 318-19.

position. Rather, he contends emerging generations care more about how a church goes “about honoring, respecting, and empowering females within their view.”⁹

Fourth, further exploration into Kimball’s preaching methodology is needed. A comprehensive assessment was not possible due to this dissertation’s limited access to his sermons.

A Personal Word

Inspired by the Berean’s spiritual curiosity as demonstrated in Acts 17:11, Kimball preached a sermon series in which he responded to questions of faith submitted by VFC members. Hearing of Kimball’s sermon series idea, Mark Driscoll implemented the same concept at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, allowing individuals to submit questions on their church website.¹⁰ In the end, 893 questions were asked, and 343,203 votes were cast.¹¹ Driscoll answered the nine questions receiving the most votes.

Receiving a second place finish with 24,642 votes was a question I submitted, “What can traditional or established churches learn from emerging churches?”¹² The reason I proposed that question on Mars Hill Church’s website in the summer of 2007 is the same reason I wrote this dissertation. Churches must be diligent in their attempt to effectively engage culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe Kimball’s ministry, rising out of the ECM, provides North American churches insight for how to reach and retain emerging generations. Ultimately, however, this dissertation’s purpose is rooted in

⁹Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 122.

¹⁰Dan Kimball, telephone interview by author, 10 May 2010.

¹¹Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 11.

¹²Driscoll eventually published his responses to the nine questions in the book *Religion Saves*.

a desire to see God's Kingdom advanced "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For God's glory.

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ABSTRACT

THE MINISTRY OF DAN KIMBALL: A MODEL FOR REACHING EMERGING GENERATIONS

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This dissertation examines the ministry of Dan Kimball to determine if his ministry is a contributing model for effective ministry to emerging generations.

Chapter 1 begins with an examination of the landscape of North American Christianity, seeking to demonstrate that the church is struggling to reach and retain emerging generations. It establishes the need for exploring effective ministry models and presents Kimball's ministry as a possible model for effective ministry to emerging generations.

Chapter 2 provides a biographical account of Kimball's life. His adolescence, college years, conversion, pastoral ministry, and roles in the ECM and contemporary Christianity receive examination.

Chapter 3 examines an evangelical theological taxonomy, or classification, of Kimball. Attention is given to his theological presuppositions and his doctrinal beliefs regarding Scripture, Christology, the gospel, and Ecclesiology.

Chapter 4 explores Kimball's methodological framework. Attention is given to those presuppositions that guide his methodology. His approach to evangelism, discipleship, worship, and preaching are examined.

Chapter 5 critiques Kimball's theology and methodology, ascertaining positive and negative contributions. Further consideration is given to the types of adjustments traditional churches might adopt as they engage emerging culture.

Chapter 6 summarizes Kimball's involvement in the ECM and his contribution to emerging generational ministry, while also identifying areas of further study regarding Kimball's ministry.

VITA

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PERSONAL

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EDUCATION

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