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In recent years, more and more people have become aware of an emerging phenomenon in mainline protestant churches. These churches in particular, and most of first-world Christendom in general, do not seem to possess the state of well-being they once did.[1]

This reduced state of well-being is manifest in a variety of ways. The most obvious manifestation occurs at the level of congregational growth. While there may be isolated exceptions, many congregations are now often finding it difficult to attract enough new members. Each year the number of new members is often unable to counter-balance the number who are lost through death, transfer, and disinterest. Moreover, even when there has been some increase in overall members, this increase has generally not kept pace with the growth of the population as a whole. As a result, mainline protestant denominations have experienced a general, and in some cases pronounced, decline in church membership.[2] Of course such a decline also has significant ramifications. When there are fewer members the level of worship attendance, the number of persons available to support church programs, and the financial base of the church also tend to diminish. This in turn sets in motion a vicious circle. Church activities that once attracted members are undermined or are forced to be eliminated.

This decline in membership is accompanied by a second factor. There is an increased feeling among many that the church is only following the culture and its agenda. It seems to these persons that the church only echoes the culture's preoccupation with matters such as the women's rights movement, the political/economic liberation movements in the third world, the

abortion debate, the concerns surrounding sexual orientation and sexuality, and the struggle over capital punishment. Moreover, disappointment is often voiced, that the church seems unable or unwilling to provide a clear prophetic witness on these troubling issues.

Added to these above feelings is a third mark of the church's perceived decline in well-being. There is a growing sense that the church has become an institution whose services persons take or leave as they feel the need. Religion appears increasingly to be treated like any of a number of other consumable products. People shop around from church to church, picking and choosing those parts which suit them. In light of this, some churches have tried to multipy their programs and services so as to address as many of these felt needs as possible. This however, raises a serious question in many peoples' minds. By doing so, is not the church losing its true identity? Is it not exchanging its identity for the opportunity to be a part of the future which the culture is creating: a future where wealth, political influence and hierarchical control dominate?

In the face of the above dynamics, a variety of analysts have emerged with solutions and strategies. These strategies appear to fall into three basic camps: those who call for a "Diaspora" approach, those who call for a "Growth" approach, and those who call for an "Incarnational" approach to church renewal. Persons in each of these camps argue that their approach is the correct one. Any other approaches, they contend, will only deepen rather than resolve the church's crisis. In the face of these claims, decision-makers and participants in the church are placed in a quandry. To whom shall they listen? Is it only a matter of who provides the most promising techniques, or who is more in tune with the latest theological trends, or who best confirms the theological opinions which one already holds? It will be the thesis of this paper that the above debate among the approaches is misplaced. That is, when properly viewed, all these approaches highlight a different but important part of a larger dynamic theological whole. Therefore, to reduce the matter to choosing exclusively only one of the approaches is to simplify unduly the challenge facing the church. Consequently, I will argue that the most important theological question is not which approach is inherently best. Rather, the question properly is, how do each of the approaches complement one

another, and how do they together generate an agenda for the future of the church.

In addressing this thesis I will first describe each of the above approaches. I will then establish how the approaches have complementary thrusts which, when taken together, form a theological whole. Finally, in light of this theological whole, I will conclude by identifying some implications for church life.

The Mandate for "Diaspora"

This approach begins with the observation that the church over the ages has been coopted by its success. Under the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine it was given official status.[3] As such it enjoyed a special place in society. It was introduced to the world of cultural legitimacy, political power, social influence, and economic wealth. Soon the church became entrapped by its special relationship. It became beholding to those in control, and began to count on the benefits which this kind of relationship brings. The church became wealthy. It enjoyed sharing in the ability to control events (inside and outside the church), it developed a sense of grandeur, and it became preoccupied with maintaining and enlarging these benefits. In this way the church began to tie its future to the future of the dominant culture.

In our time, this view observes, the dominant culture has taken the form of technocratic, capitalistic society. This means, that as the church continues to pursue its "Constantinian" relationship with the state, it is increasingly compromised by the values of the present techno-culture. More specifically, the church finds itself being drawn into the culture's:

1 drive for unqualified efficiency (despite the result of alienating levels of societal mobility which undermine any real sense of community life),

2 uninhibited desire to be the biggest and/or most powerful (often expressed in hierarchical structures and terms that tend to be insensitive to those who are marginalized in society),

3 pursuit of security at all costs (even to the threatened use of nuclear weapons),

4 relentless press to assure present and future economic well-being through unrestricted consumption and the accumulation of wealth (a press that often puts the pursuit of capital before the welfare of people).

In light of this close connection between the present culture and the church, it is not surprising that this approach finds the church often blind to the destructive dynamics of the culture. The church, like the culture, is found to engage in a false optimism. There is a dominant belief that if people just keep doing what they are doing, with dedication and good will, all the destructive dynamics in the culture will work themselves out. This of course has not happened. If anything, the crises in society seem to be increasing rather than decreasing.

As people have become aware of the seeming intransigence of the culture's destructive dynamics, they also have become aware of the apparent weakness of the church. In its present "Constantinian" form the church appears to be unable to provide any effective ways to address those dynamics. Moreover, the church has itself become the victim of these very forces. As the dynamics of techno-culture have worked to bring about the disappearance of community life, they have also simultaneously brought about the disappearance of the central place of the church in the lives of the people.[4]

In the face of this reality, however, this approach argues that the church ought not despair. Rather it ought to see its decline as a blessing in disguise, as a reminder that the gospel is a gospel of the cross. Douglas Hall points to this when he notes:

> When the church succeeded in worldly terms, turned its very gospel into a worldly success story, it removed Jesus from the sphere of all who suffer and are victims of human success, all who fail, all who die.[5]

This means that the present decline of the church is a special opportunity for the church. It is an opportunity for the church to be free from its culturally institutionalized bondage. It is a chance to recover its proper mission: to be in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the powerless in society. It is an opportunity to engage most deliberately in a ministry of social justice in the world, not from the "top down" but from the "bottom up". Therefore, in this view, any attempt to try and recover the former success of the church would be an act of betrayal. It would undermine this special opportunity.

The specific form which the church would take, as it seizes this special opportunity, is not fully clear. However, one thing is clear, it would be a "diaspora" church. That is, it would

be a body which identifies with the early beginnings of the church. This would mean it would exhibit at least three basic characteristics. First, rather than being a community to which one belongs simply because one's family belonged, it would see itself as a "community of belief". As such, it would be a body which emerges out of personal commitment. Second, rather than being an organization, it would see itself as a "movement", a dispersed, flexible, gathering of persons who seek to follow God into the dark places of the world. It would be a community dedicated to the pursuit of God's future for humanity. Third, rather than being part of the dominant majority, it would see itself as a "creative minority". It would take the form of "little flocks", seeking to declare God's prophetic word in and for the world.[6]

To begin to achieve this end, this approach suggests certain steps be taken. First, Christians and congregations should "stop feeling ashamed for being little". Congregations should in fact "think little" rather than aspire to growth. In this view, theologically and sociologically, "the only truly viable *Christian* congregation is a small one!" Second, Christians should seek to re-read the church's tradition, the scriptures, and the reality of the world. They should read them with eyes that reach beyond "Constantinian" based "Christian Education".[7] Christians should rediscover the insight of Luther that,

> ... the one thing that the church could not give away or give up—the only thing that it must absolutely retain—is its participation in the suffering of its Lord, which is at the same time its participation in the world's suffering. If there is no suffering, no brokenness, there is no church.[8]

Third, Christians, congregations, and the larger organizational church are called to simplify their lifestyles. They are to give up the unessential wealth and power which they hold. This would of course have to be done in stages, so as to be sensitive to those who might have to find new jobs. Nevertheless, a definite plan for lifestyle simplification, with specific goals and a specific timeline, should be undertaken.[9]

This approach calls for a transformative shift from the old "Constantinian" paradigm, which has informed most of the church's life, to a paradigm that focuses on a cruciform shape of the church. In light of this the chuch is called to live on the boundary between Christ and Culture. Its mission is one

of solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and powerless. This mission is informed by the future God is preparing for us, a future into which God is luring us, as a part of all creation.

This approach obviously presents a very compelling vision. However, this is not the only perspective offering itself for consideration by Christians. An alternative vision is presented by those who are concerned that the church recover its proper identity. For them the church needs to become an embodied witness, in and to the world, of what God wills for all humanity. It is to that vision that we now turn.

The Call to "Incarnate" Ministry

This approach feels that the church's current crisis can be traced back to a fundamental fact. The church's sense of identity has been subverted by modern society. This subversion has occurred on at least two levels. On one level, the church has been subverted by allowing itself to be drawn into a working partnership with government. This partnership was inaugerated with the emperor Constantine. From that time on government has offered political and economic security to the church. This security has been given to the church in exchange for the government's right to exercise a controlling influence over the practice of freedom and truth in society.[10] William Willimon puts the matter well when he notes,

> ... churches are unable to be very critical of the current social order, since they rely upon this order as a prop for a church more concerned with being attuned to the status quo than being truthful. In our approach to social problems, we have decided to be honey to help the world's solutions go down easier rather than be the salt of the earth. We have trusted governmental legislative coercion rather than the power of our witness to the truth. In so doing we have given evidence that truth alone is not strong enough to preserve the church.[11]

In this way the identity of the church has been compromised.

On another level, the church has also allowed itself to be subverted by contemporary culture. In this view, "thoughtless social involvement and indiscriminate openness have led to a crisis of identity".[12] That is, this approach believes the church has been led by the theological thinking of the 1960s to "let the world set the agenda". Therefore the church has

been drawn into working with a particular cultural agenda. This agenda has generally taken the form of pursuing the values of a) freedom as individual autonomy, b) truth as an a-historical appreciation of "scientific" data (with a concomitant non- appreciation of traditional wisdom), and c) utilitarianism informed by an anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional bias. It is as these values have come to play a formative role in the life of the church, that this approach finds the church's identity has been further compromised.[13]

One result of this subversion of the church's identity has been the inability of the church to give real guidance on everyday ethical questions. In line with this Dr. Willimon observes,

> In approaching ethical problems, we cannot afford to refer to the biblical witness, or even church tradition, because we are attempting to reduce our stance to a position every thinking, sensitive American can affirm. Everything must be yes and no because we cannot speak of sin to those who do not know a standard of justice other than their own opinion, who do not know a God who forgives.[14]

Given such ambiguous assistance, and the compromised identity which informs it, this approach is not surprised that growing numbers of people find the church to be peripheral to their lives. However, this approach also believes that steps can be taken to reverse the present decline.

Such steps must be chosen very carefully. Attempts to recover authentic identity through increased social service activities in the public realm will only intensify the problem. You cannot consciously embody Christian service to others if you are not first clear about your own identity as a Christian steward. Therefore, the most immediate need is that attention be given to building "community in the church". Such activity, however, should not be understood as a retreat from social concern. Rather, its aim is to engage society on the church's own terms. That is, to engage in "a social activism that is appropriate for those under the cross who constantly wonder what it means to 'not be conformed to this world' (Rom. 12:2), those who recognize Jesus Christ as Lord."[15]

It should be noted that this call for building "community in the church" is based on a particular understanding of the mission of the church. More specifically, this approach feels the church is not called "to provide suggestions for social policy but to be, in [its] existence, a social policy."[16] This means

the church is to bear witness, through its very being, to the fact that God in Christ is making a new social order possible. However, this social order is not based upon "what works or upon competing self interest, but upon [Christ's] lordship".[17] Such an incarnate witness is necessary because, in this view, the best that social/political arrangements can ever do is "give the less powerful a little more power and call that justice". But this is not enough. "The world cannot give dignity to the very young, the very old, the very retarded, the very sick, there must be hope that they are not dependent upon policy but upon the promise that God's love is stronger than the forces of evil."[18] It is the contention of this approach that the only source for such a radical hope is the church, not as it is, but as it is called to be. That is, the church needs to be a koinonia which, based on the love of God, "prophetically create[s] the real world".[19]

Thus this approach calls on the church to become an incarnation for society of what God wills for all creation. In this way it stands as a beacon of hope and a prophetic demonstration to the world of what can and should be. As such it is called to be a place where "strangers become relatives; the weak are cherished; those who do not fit into the world's standards of value are baptized; and the poor are royalty."[20]

This incarnational mission will of course be an on-going task of the church. The church must keep "criticizing [its] message, mission, and life together so that [it] becomes a people who are being formed and reformed by [its] dominant convictions."[21] It is as this is done, as the people of the church seek in fact, to live under the cross, to not be conformed to the world, and to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord, that the church will recover its vitality. In this way the church will again play a powerful and important role. The church must again recover its identity, not as a necessary evil in the process of personal revivalism nor as base of operations for changing society,[22] but as the true salt and leaven in the world.

This second approach has, as did the first approach, much to recommend it. However, there yet remains a third perspective which needs to be considered. In contrast to the first approach (which identified the need for a transformative paradigm shift to a diaspora form of the church), and the second approach (which called for a recovery of the true incarnational identity

of the church), this third perspective focuses on the need for the church to pursue a process of re-unified growth. It is felt that such growth will help displace the alienating fragmentation of contemporary life. It is to this third perspective that we now turn.

The Challenge for "Re-unified Growth"

This approach locates the source of the churches' decline in the rise of industrialization. With the coming of industrialization a number of dynamics were set in motion which dramatically reshaped the social fabric of society. Among these dynamics were the need for societal mobility (with its concomitant press for adaptability), and the need for increased consumption.

The first of these dynamics arose from the fact that people had to go where the jobs were. However, in contemporary society the opportunities for employment often follow the ever changing dictates of the market. Moreover, industrialization has dramatically widened the market area that must be served. As a result people are forced to become more and more mobile. They are called on to move frequently from town to town, to work with a wide variety of individuals with different points of view, and to often adapt themselves to new and different work settings.

Given this reality, it is not surprising that people have come to see themselves as autonomous units in society. Concomitantly they have also limited their involvement in the communities where they live. After all, if you knew you would likely not be staying very long in a place, you would not be inclined to establish relationships that soon would have to be severed. Moreover, because of these diminished communal relationships, each person has also been forced individually to take responsibility for piecing together the "worldview of meaning" which informs his or her life. In this way, the mobility in the society has generated a fragmentation of contemporary life, a fragmentation which alienates individuals from each other.

The second of these dynamics, the need for increased consumption, is the result of industrial society's increased level of production. If production is to continue, people need to buy what has been produced. To accommodate this need there has

developed in industrial society a special perception. This perception is that a person's status and value in the society are significantly related to how many goods and services they are able to consume. Persons who can afford to drive an expensive car, live in an elite neighborhood, or hire large numbers of people to perform services for them, are considered to have higher social standing than those who can not. A consumer mind-set is a central part of industrial culture.

As these two dynamics come together in contemporary culture they generate within people the drive to be "selective consumers". They are selective in which activities and organizations they will join, selective in what ideas they adopt and how they put those ideas together, and selective in what they invest themselves in. This has carried over into all dimensions of people's lives, including their relation to the church. People have come to see the church (religion) as just another part of the smorgasbord of life. They pick and choose in religious matters, as in all matters of their life, in accordance with the present state of their taste. In this regard Reginald Bibby observes,

> Faced with a wide variety of choices in every sphere of life, [people] become selective consumers. Religion is not exempt from this process. It, too, is drawn upon carefully by Canadians for whom time and financial concerns are paramount. For most, selective participation takes the place of wholesale involvement.[23]

In light of this, churches have responded by reshaping the way they serve people. They have created more and varied programs to meet the desires of those who might attend or use their services. They have tried to package their service in a more appealing fashion. They have sought to monitor better the trends of society so as to be in touch with the most current social concern or cultural development. However, in responding this way, churches have reinforced the perception that religion adds nothing new to life. In this way they have promoted the idea that religion is simply another cultural product to be consumed. In the words of Bibby:

> Religion has always claimed to bring something from beyond to culture. The Gods, so believers have claimed, have spoken to us about life and death. However, when religion is drawn up in accordance with the whims of customers, the gods are dismantled. ....Rather than looking to them for direction, we direct them, as if we were ventriloquists and they our dummies. When religion becomes nothing more than a consumer item, the customer is in charge. The

> gods, relegated to an a-la-carte role, have little to say about everyday life.[24]

Given this reality, this approach finds the present decline in the well-being of the church to be expected. If the church (religion) has "little to say about everyday life", it is not surprising that people might express a decreasing or very selective interest in becoming involved with it.

While the above state of affairs may appear to some as almost beyond recovery, this approach is not so pessimistic. A renewal of the church is possible, but only if it re-establishes the important role religion can play in people's lives. More specifically, the church must again provide a perceptual framework which will enable people to integrate all dimensions of their lives. Such a framework would have to take into account and re-correlate their personal selfhood, their community relationships, and their relation to God.

In more concrete terms, such an integrative framework would help people recognize, a) there is meaning for individuals which precedes all human attempts at giving life significance, b) the importance of maximizing their personal potentials, and c) the ways in which God enables them to reach beyond their personal limits into new realms of human fulfillment. As it does this it would highlight the importance of both promoting the values of intimacy, caring and community, and addressing the injustices that constantly violate all dimensions of our lives. [25]

This approach finds that most attempts to renew the church have failed to include all three of these dimensions (God, self, society) in their efforts. Therefore they have not been successful. However, it is felt that as all three are re-connected the church will again begin to grow. In Bibby's view,

> ... religious groups currently stressing these three dimensions will tend to be denominations and individual congregations experiencing the best responses. Time-conscious, consumption-minded Canadians will be finding that they are encountering more than mere culture, that self does not have to be suppressed, that the desire for community and concern for others is being realized. A religion like that will not get a positive response from everyone. But if I read our culture accurately, it cannot help but gain a positive response from many.[26]

The Dilemma

When you review the above three approaches one thing becomes clear. While there are many points of contact, there are also significant differences among them. The "Diaspora" approach opposes any attempt to rekindle growth within the current "Constantinian" paradigm of social life. It is felt that such attempts will undermine the fundamental changes that are needed in the church and the culture. Therefore, if the church is to be revitalized, a radical change is called for in both the church's structure and perspective. The church must enter into a societally involved program of solidarity with the poor, marginalized and powerless. Nothing less will suffice. Therefore this approach would find the solution of the "Re-unified Growth" approach to be inadequate because it fails to resist the "Constantinian" shape of culture. It would also find the solution of the "Incarnational" approach to be unacceptable. That approach is seen to distance the church too much from the cultural setting of the poor, marginalized and powerless.

In contrast, however, the "Re-unified Growth" approach believes that a solution to the church's decline can be found which requires a less radical adjustment than the "Diaspora" approach calls for. Rather, it believes that it is only a matter of re-focusing and re-connecting, in a more wholistic way, the work of the church within the current social framework. If properly pursued, the church can re-cover its previous levels of growth without significantly altering its present structures. The "Re-unified Growth" approach would also find the solution of the "Incarnational" approach to be insufficient. The "Incarnational" approach would be seen to be unduly idealistic. Moreover, it would tend to ignore the important ways participation in the culture can positively contribute to the understanding of the church's identity and mission.

While the "Incarnational" approach would agree that the "Constantinian" model of social life has been a source of the church's problem, it would not endorse the call of the "Diaspora" approach for direct church involvement in the formation of political/economic social policy. Such involvement, it is felt, would only continue to place the church in the culture on the culture's and not the church's terms. Rather, the church should become a colony of heaven that prophetically incarnates

the shape of God's will for society. Only in this way should it challenge society to a higher possibility. Similarly, it would agree with the "Re-unified Growth" approach that contemporary culture has undermined the voice of the church. However, it would not support the call for the church (religion) to work again with government by suggesting social policy for the society. It would find the solution of the "Re-unified Growth" approach to be too much "of" the world rather than prophetically "in" it.

Faced with this impasse, what course of action should Christians take? Some might suggest that since all of the above approaches obviously have significant strengths as well as weaknesses, no one approach is clearly superior to any other. Consequently, it would be best either to select an approach which fits beliefs you already hold, or simply to choose arbitrarily an approach that appeals to you. Of course, should you do this, you would be called on to oppose the remaining approaches on grounds similar to those described above. Simultaneously, you would also become active in actualizing your chosen approach.

While this may be seen by some to be the most obvious counsel to follow, I do not believe it is the wisest counsel. There is enough truth in each of these approaches to give us pause before adopting a course of action that is so exclusivistic and neat. In contrast, I believe an alternative can be found that, a) will do justice to the truth in each of these approaches, b) will not reduce them to some homogenized amalgam, and c) will reach beyond the impasse among them.

One immediate source for developing such an alternative might be found in the work of H. Richard Niebuhr.[27] Richard Niebuhr provides what has become a classic five-fold typology of the relation of religion (including the church) and culture. However, while such a typology might generally be very helpful, I believe for the purposes at hand, to reach beyond these approaches, other help is needed. What is needed is a consideration of the fundamental dynamics, the life process, which stands behind and informs the approaches described.

I have found the work of Paul Tillich to be particularly helpful in addressing the nature of the life process in history. Moreover, his work in the area of "theology and culture" is well known and his insights appear to have a direct bearing on our dilemma. In light of this, I believe an alternative can be

developed from the theological insights of Paul Tillich. It will be to this alternative that I will now turn.

Reaching Beyond the Impasse

In speaking about the basic process of life, Tillich notes that one can discern three basic elements or movements. These elements, which are distinguishable but not separable from one another, are identified as self-integration, self-alteration, and self-transcendence. In each of these elements it should be noted that the term "self" refers to life as a whole including both the community and the individual.[28]

Tillich describes the first of these elements, "self-integration", as "... the circular movement of life from a center and back to its center."[29] Here the focus is on "being" as the embodiment of an indivisible centre or point of self-identity, without which any sense of individuality and thus any potential for sponsoring action and purpose would be lost. It should be noted that this process of "centredness", as an element in the life process, occurs only as there is participation in that which surrounds the centre. To be centred implies that there is a reaching out into the universe surrounding the centre and drawing elements of the universe back into the centre.[30]

The drive of centred things to expand beyond their parameters Tillich identifies as "self-alteration". This drive is manifested in both the production of new centres of growth beside the original centre and in the establishment of new foundations for the growth of the initial centre. Here the focus is on the press of life towards growth or the production of change which, given the process of centredness, reaches beyond the centre. This involves the ability of the self not only to exist in an environment but to reach beyond that environment, shaping and developing it through the culture by way of imagination, thought, and action. However, Tillich cautions, this growth should not be seen simply as a shift from one unrelated centre to another. Rather, the new form which growth produces remains always intimately related to the original centre. The past always forms the context for the future without which the future could not appear.[31]

The third basic element implied in the life process involves the ability of persons to stand outside their finitude. That is,

it involves the freedom to recognize the unambiguous, infinite dimension of life within the existential constraints and ambiguities of history. It includes the ability to respond to this historical encounter with the Unconditioned. Here the focus is on freedom as it embodies the ability to transcend the finitude and ambiguities of life. As such it involves the capacity of persons, individually and in community, to be grasped by the "transcendent power that supports being" and the "transcendent meaning toward which history is directed".[32] This means that self-transcendence does not imply some juxtaposition of static purity over against the impure world. Rather it reflects a creativity which, as it is grounded in the Unconditioned, breaks through particular historical destructive realities, transforming them and giving them a significance that transcends their destructive dynamics.[33]

From the above descriptions it is clear that all three of these basic elements of the life process form a balanced unity within the diversity among them. That is, each element reflects a separate dimension of the life process and therefore cannot be identified with any other element. However, each of the elements is also inseparable from the others as the life process unfolds. Experience tells us that for growth to occur there must be a centre which embodies that growth. At the same time, growth necessarily implies on the one hand the freedom to transcend a particular historical context (with all its limitations), and on the other hand, the capacity to establish the meaning of a situation as a basis for change-producing decisions.

Of course, as persons and groups encounter one another in the dynamics of life, the "strength of presence" of one or another of these different life elements will vary with time and context. Some elements will be enhanced and others will be diminished. Consequently, attention must be paid to the shifts in the balance among them, so that appropriate rebalancing can be done to facilitate full human development.[34]

Given this description of the life process, it logically follows that the movement of history, including the development of the church, will also include a press for fulfillment in each of the areas described above. Tillich affirms this when he writes:

> History, in terms of the self-integration of life, drives toward a centeredness of all history-bearing groups and their individual members in an unambiguous harmony of power and justice. History, in

> terms of the self-creativity [self-alteration] of life drives toward the creation of a new, unambiguous state of things. And history, in terms of the self-transcendence of life, drives toward the universal, unambiguous fulfillment of the potentiality of being.[35]

Of course, such drives toward historical fulfillment always stand, as does all of history, under the ambiguities of life. Any mention of progress in these drives toward fulfillment must immediately be tempered by the recognition that "theonomy" (historical fulfillment) cannot become stasis and remain theonomy. Rather it is an on-going, ever-renewed process that must be recovered with every new event and age. In this regard Tillich notes,

> History runs toward fulfillment through all the processes of life, notwithstanding the fact that while it runs toward the ultimate it remains bound to the preliminary, and in running toward fulfillment it defeats fulfillment. It does not escape the ambiguities of life by striving in all processes toward unambiguous life.[36]

The Dilemma Revisited

In light of Paul Tillich's insights two observations can now be made regarding the three approaches to church renewal. On one level, all of the basic elements of the life process are being addressed within each of the approaches. Each of the approaches sees the need to transcend the present malaise, each seeks to help the church recover or establish a renewed sense of identity, and each attempts to prescribe steps which will facilitate the church's needed growth as they see it. However, on another level, it can also be seen that each of the approaches focuses more keenly on a different one of the basic elements. Moreover, each approach then uses its selected element as an integrating center for the rest of its analysis. In this way a secondary concern is placed on the elements not selected.

More specifically, it will be remembered, the "Incarnational" approach called for the church to recover its true identity. It was through that identity that the church is to be an incarnational witness of what God would will for all creation. This identity was to include a call to live under the cross, to not be conformed to the world, and to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. Here, clearly, the basic element of self-integration (identity) is seen to be of central concern. Therefore it has

been given the greatest attention and the rest of the elements are developed around it.

Alternatively, the "Diaspora" approach called for the adoption of a radically new understanding of the church and the culture. This new understanding would call for a shift from the long supported "Constantinian" framework of the church, to a "Diaspora" paradigm of the church. Here the basic element of self-transcendence (transformation) is seen to be in most need of attention in the church and the culture. It therefore has been placed at the centre of this approach and the other elements are given a supporting role.

In parallel fashion, the "Re-unified Growth" approach called on the church to take steps to play a more contributory role in society. This role was to facilitate the reconnection of the fragmented foci of peoples lives, namely, God, self, and society (community). It was felt that as this occurred the church could expect to experience again the levels of growth and influence that it once did. Here the focus of attention has definitely fallen on the self-alteration (growth) element of the life process while the other elements are given secondary attention.

Implications for Ministry

Given the above correspondence between the three approaches and the three basic elements of the life process, and given the fundamental unity in diversity among the three basic elements, it can now be seen that beyond their differences the three approaches do in fact share a basic unity. Each of the approaches, in effect, has identified important insights for the church regarding the present needs surrounding one of the basic elements of the life process. As such they form an important complementary, dialectical witness which should be taken seriously. However, the way in which this witness is appropriated is as important as the witness itself.

As we have seen, each of the approaches focuses on one of the dimensions (elements) of the life process. As such they each provide important insights into how to address properly the corresponding needs of congregations, or persons. However, not all congregations or persons experience the same needs in the life process at the same time. Needs change as contexts change, and contexts are always changing. For example, for

some the primary need now may be to reach out beyond the congregation's or the church's current framework of activity, and in freedom actualize a more fulfilling, transformed future. For those persons or congregations the "Diaspora" approach is most appropriate. But for others the primary need may be more centred on questions of identity or growth. The approach selected should always correspond to the basic contextual need of the setting in which ministry is going to be done. To select one approach and follow it exclusively will mean that as the context changes, the things called for by the selected approach will increasingly not meet the emerging needs of the situation. The selected approach will then in fact become counter productive. Moreover, the selected approach itself will contribute to this process, as it gives only secondary attention to the needs generated by the other basic elements.

To indefinitely focus on one approach at the expense of the others, is both to promote something that is good in a partial way, and also to promote a distorted and incomplete understanding of the ways in which God, in, with, and under the theology of the cross, is touching our lives. Rather, we must be constantly attentive to the basic needs (spoken and unspoken, interpersonal and systemic) of the context as they come and go, and change approaches so as to address them accordingly.

This will mean that congregations in particular and the church in general should first:

1 look for the ways in which God is breaking open old patterns in the congregation's life, the life of persons within the congregation and outside it, and the life of society locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. To what extent is this self-transcendent (transformation) element informing the church's life?

2 look for ways the congregation has an opportunity to grow in its present response to the activity of God in its midst, congregationally, personally, and societally. To what extent is this self-alteration (growth) element manifest in the church's life?

3 look for ways to strengthen the congregation's sense of how, when it lives and acts, it does so as representatives and stewards of God's kingdom, and as a central mark of God's

presence in the world, in the family, and in our work together. To what extent is this self-integration (identity) element operative in the church's life?

Then, in light of what is discovered, the emergent needs should be prioritized so as to work toward rebalancing the operative levels of self-integration (identity), self-alteration (growth), and self-transcendence (transformation). Following that, an appropriate approach (or combination of approaches) should be selected and pursued which will enable the needed rebalancing to take place. Finally, a re-evaluation of both the congregational/church needs and the adopted approaches should be undertaken on a regular basis.

As this procedure becomes a regular process of the church's life, church renewal will surely be enhanced.

Notes

1 Recent examples of books which address this matter include: Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987); Douglas John Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where are We Headed?* (The United Church of Canada: The United Church Publishing House, 1989); Douglas John Hall, *Has The Church A Future?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980); Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Lyle E. Schaller, *It's A Different World!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987); Douglas W. Johnson, *Vitality Means Church Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); William H. Willimon, *What's Right With The Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985).

2 Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987) 13–15.

3 Douglas John Hall, *Has The Church A Future?* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980) 41–48.

4 Douglas John Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where are We Headed?* (The United Church of Canada: The United Church Publishing House, 1989) 16–17.

5 Hall, *Has The Church A Future?*, 47.

6 Ibid. 52–57.

7 Ibid. 183–187.

8 Ibid. 169.

9 Ibid. 187–189.

10 William H. Willimon, *What's Right With The Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985) 57, 62.

11 Ibid. 60.

12 Ibid. 58.
13 Ibid. 17–18.
14 Ibid. 59.
15 Ibid. 58.
16 Ibid. 64.
17 Ibid. 62.
18 Ibid. 68.
19 Ibid. 66.
20 Ibid. 65–66.
21 Ibid. 61.
22 Ibid. 14–16.
23 Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 148.
24 Ibid. 148–149.
25 Ibid. 263–266.
26 Ibid. 269.
27 See the following books by H. Richard Niebuhr: *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).
28 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 30.
29 Ibid. 30.
30 Ibid. 30. See also pp. 32–50 for a fuller treatment of this element.
31 Ibid. 31. See also pp. 50–86 for a fuller treatment of this element.
32 Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936) 277.
33 Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 31. See also pp. 86–110 for a fuller treatment of this element.
34 Ibid. 386.
35 Ibid. 332.
36 Ibid. 332.