



Study Guide

for

***Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and
Class Divisions in a Consumer
Church (Eerdmans, 2007)***

by

Paul Louis Metzger

**Study Guide developed by Bryan Dormaier, Ross
Halbach, Andreas Lundén, Adam McInturf, Paul
Louis Metzger and William Thompson**

Introduction

“Trading Stone Altars for Coffee Bars”

In his introduction, Paul Louis Metzger asserts that he will challenge the evangelical consumer oriented ‘niche-church Christianity’ that fosters racial and economic divisions within the body of Christ and offer an ‘alternative theological paradigm’ that will call for overcoming these consumer-oriented divisions. Metzger sees a dichotomy between what the evangelical church says and what it communicates. The church preaches against the evils of popular culture and yet readily adapts itself to culturally acceptable marketing practices to win over the public. Metzger sees in this ‘coffee bar culture’ a church communicating that it will provide attendees with the same things the world offers—everything involved in self-fulfillment. The church often acts as a new ‘opiate for the consumer classes,’ offering people products and programs for consumption, rather than the life challenging, and life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Metzger tells the story of African-American evangelical civil rights leader, Dr. John M. Perkins, as an example of the power of the gospel to move people toward racial and social reconciliation. Metzger believes that many evangelical church growth structures foster segregation, rather than reconciliation, by appealing to consumer desires for comfort, rather than comforting people with the cross of Christ that breaks down divisions. Finally, Metzger offers a two-part explanation for the title of his book. First, the book deals with consumerism and how it reinforces cultural divisions of race and class within the church. The American evangelical church is often consumed with its own self-interest, favoring segregation because focusing on niche group ministry grows church numbers, though often not spiritual health. Second, he asserts that the church needs to be consumed by Christ—who reorients our desires—so that we can see him and his gospel clearly, leaving segregation behind in favor of repentance and reconciliation. Metzger envisions a unified church of diverse races and classes, praying Jesus’ prayer in John 17 that we would be one as he and the Father are one.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. Metzger shares his experience in the U. S. immigration office with his wife as an example of feeling voiceless and powerless. Have you ever faced a similar situation? If so, what was it like?
2. Read aloud Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus," on page two. How does the poem reflect your experience of American society at large and the church?
3. Metzger writes on page four, "It is not simply what we say that matters, but also what we communicate. Sometimes, because we cannot recognize what we are communicating to others, we need an outsider's perspective." Do you agree? Why or why not? What image do you think the church should ideally communicate to the broader society?
4. What does a church coffee bar communicate? What does the Lord's Table communicate?
5. What do you personally think are the reasons that John M. Perkins' story made such an impact on the Reed students, and on Metzger? Do you agree with Metzger when he says that Perkins' story communicates a nobler, all-consuming vision of the Evangelical Christian faith than we often experience? Why or why not?
6. Metzger writes on page ten, "The consumer-driven church culture fosters homogeneity and upward mobility, not the transforming harmony and downward mobility of the triune God that is realized in the Cross and Resurrection." How does the author relate the "homogenous unit principle" to segregation? Have you experienced this phenomenon in your church? If so, what was your experience?

Application

1. Create a blog for your group where the group as a whole can reflect on how race and class issues impact your daily life. This week, write a short entry on your ethnic background, the meaning of your name, and your experience with race and class issues during your upbringing.
2. This week invite someone who is outside of the "niche group" of your church to hang out in your normal social context. Ask them about their thoughts on how they perceive you and others. Ask if you can hang out with them in their normal social context.
3. Meditate on John 17, and ask God to help you and the church community imagine and live life in ways that breaks down divisions—such as race and class divisions in a consumer church culture—out of gratitude to God for his gracious, inclusive love.

Suggested Reading

Zach Dundas. “The J Crew: Meet Portland’s Evangelicals,” *Willamette Week*, 1 December 2004.

Charles Marsh. *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

John M. Perkins. *Let Justice Roll Down*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1976.

Suggested Movies

Crash (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0375679/>)

Amistad (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118607/>)

Chapter 1

“A Faulty Order: Retreating Battle Camps and Homogeneous Units”

This chapter traces the historical development of the fundamentalist-evangelical movement in America and history's influence on the movement's current direction. Metzger asserts that both the Religious Left and Religious Right are 'consumed by the wrong priorities' of maintaining their own best interests through wielding political power. Historically, evangelicalism played a major role in forming American social and moral culture, but with the onslaught of theological liberalism and Darwinism, it found itself on the defensive as it was moved to the margins of society. Metzger outlines three themes of fundamentalism-evangelicalism: 1) anti-intellectualism bound up in part with its reaction to the 'liberalization' of mainline denominational seminaries; 2) antipathy toward social action resulting from the belief that it would distract the church from evangelism; 3) certain pre-millennial views of the end times (i.e., envisioning the rapture of the church prior to the tribulation of God's judgment) that were wrongly employed to discourage meaningful engagement of the culture at large. On this view, saving souls is much more important than trying to fix a broken world that is going to burn in the end. Metzger notes that in 1947 Carl F.H. Henry called for the evangelical movement to wake up to its own separatist tendencies. In 1998 James Montgomery Boice pointed out that the movement has not only ignored Henry's call, but that it has become comfortable in its segregated culture and has turned to grasping for power at the center of American politics. The movement often focuses on moral issues of personal importance rather than addressing social issues of race relations, poverty, and health crises. Metzger reminds us that 'Jesus did not die to save us from liberals—he died to save us from ourselves.' We should stop blaming others, and start looking at what we have become ourselves. The church has largely lost sight of its fundamental allegiance to God's kingdom, becoming both proud and autonomous—using political power to gain an advantage for its constituents—while leaving those without a voice to fend for themselves. Perhaps most disturbing is that the movement is largely blind to its power politics of self-interest and having co-opted the practices of the consumer culture. The evangelical movement's tendency to foster segregation and individualism is historically-based, but we need not submit to repeating that history, but rather to being consumed by Christ, following after his heart for reconciliation and unity within the church.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. History helps us understand who we are. It shapes both the present and the future. How has what you have learned about the history of the church helped you understand who you are personally and collectively?
2. How are the “three themes of fundamentalism-evangelicalism” (anti-intellectualism, antipathy toward social action, and misappropriations of pre-millennial views of the end times) evident in your church? How does that affect the way your church engages culture?
3. How do you think the history of fundamentalism-evangelicalism impacts the current culture wars as well as the movement’s particular engagement of race and class divisions in a consumer culture?
4. Evangelicals often argue that we are responsible for Adam’s sin. Does that imply that we may also be responsible for the transgressions of our ancestors to the extent that we benefit from them, i.e. the slavery and injustice against African Americans and Native Americans? Explain the rationale for your answer.
5. In light of the discussion on anti-intellectualism, how do you see reason and faith in relation to one another? Which of these do you emphasize and why?
6. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of separating from culture? How do you see Jesus remaining distinct yet inseparable from culture?
7. What do you make of the statement often attributed to Martin Luther: “If the world were to end tomorrow, I would plant a tree today”?

Application

1. Do a background study on your church. Find out more about its origin, theological distinctiveness, and denomination, among other things. Present your findings to the group you meet with and discuss one another’s research.

Suggested Reading

James Montgomery Boice. “Our All-Too-Easy Conscience.” *Modern Reformation* 7, no. 5, September/October 1998.

Shane Claiborne. *Jesus for President*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Carl F. H. Henry. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947; reprint, with a foreword by Richard J. Mouw, 2003.

Study Guide—Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church
©2008, Paul Louis Metzger, Bryan Dornaier, Ross Halbach, Andreas Lundén, Adam McInturf and William Thompson

George Marsden. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

David O Moberg. *The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern*. rev. ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977.

John Steinbeck. *Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.

Suggested Movies

Mississippi Burning (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095647/>)

To Kill a Mockingbird (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056592/>)

Lord, Save us from Your Followers (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1237900/>)

Inherit the Wind (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053946/>)

Chapter 2

“Disordered Vision: Battling the Consumer Balrog”

This chapter analyzes the subtle and seductive power of consumerism, and how it negatively affects people’s thoughts and actions concerning issues of race and class in the evangelical church. Metzger contends that this situation resembles that of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* books, where humanity finds itself caught between forces of good and evil vying for its allegiance. The two diabolical forces seducing the church today are consumerism and the free-market enterprise. These forces cultivate divisions within the church by attracting and grouping people based on their race and class affinities. Metzger explains that divisions come as a result of having replaced the old trade triangle of slavery, sugar, and shipping (noted in the introduction) with a modern trade triangle of consumerism, homogeneity, and upward mobility that segregates Christians along lines of race and class. Metzger contends that we are often blind to contemporary culture’s divisive consumer-driven structures because we believe that racial problems are behind us and cannot see the subtle connection between consumerism and race/class divisions. Metzger notes that the success of the ‘homogeneous unit principle’ in church growth marketing is bound up in part with its appeal to consumer affinities; the employment of this principle easily leads us to ignore those who are outside the ‘target’ demographic.

Among other things, Metzger believes that the evangelical church has to deal with its anti-structural biases because they blind the church to its own structural problems. He retells a baseball analogy given by John Perkins: two teams (one white team and one black team) are playing a game and it is discovered that the white team has been cheating and in so doing has gained a 20-0 advantage. The white team apologizes and promises to play by the rules from that point on, *but the score is still 20-0*. This is the skewed perspective with which many affluent to middle-class white Christians approach racial reconciliation. We are willing to admit past mistakes, but due to our anti-structural biases, we do not see the structural disparities that remain between the two ‘teams’ both in the church and in the larger society. How can we tell minorities to get over it when we haven’t even dealt with it? Metzger believes that the church needs to see that its consumerist tendency to divide people into affinity-based small groups promotes homogeneity and desensitizes us to the plight of those outside our social networks. He states that the church must rediscover its identity centered in Christ and reconfigure itself to witness to the defeat of the forces of consumerism and its particular fostering of race and class divisions. Only in living through faith and hope in Christ’s love will the church witness to the gospel’s victory over dehumanizing forces operating in the world today.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. How does consumerism present itself as omnipotent and omnipresent? How do some see this as a good thing? How do church-growth strategies presume and promote a consumerist mindset as the natural state of things?
2. What is the modern “trade triangle” Metzger outlines? Why are Evangelicals particularly susceptible to being blind to it?
3. Metzger argues that social structures shape personal relationships in society and the church—a fact that Evangelicals historically have ignored. How do you see structures shaping your personal relationships? How is the death and resurrection of Christ relevant to both the structural and personal aspects of sin (draw upon Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2:14-15 in your answer)?
4. What is the relationship between consumerism and racism/classism?
5. In what ways is the church in America tempted to confuse numerical *success* with true *faithfulness* to the gospel?
6. Why have Evangelicals tended to emphasize individuals over structures? What is the importance of each for the church?

Application

1. Ask someone from a different ethnicity about his or her thoughts on affirmative action. Write a blog entry reflecting on the input.
2. Talk to a pastor in an impoverished area about the pressing needs in that community and the major obstacles that the congregation faces.
3. Keep a journal or some other kind of record of your purchases for a month. Reflect on why you buy what you buy. Do you buy because of the functionality of the commodity, or because it is helping you become a certain kind of person?

Suggested Reading

William T. Cavanaugh. *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

David Fitch. *The Great Giveaway*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.

Edward Gilbreath and Mark Galli. “Harder than Anyone Can Imagine,” *Christianity Today* (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/april/23.36.html>) (posted 4/01/05).

Rick McKinley. *This Beautiful Mess: Preaching the Presence of the Kingdom of God*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2006.

[Anna Quindlen](#). “Honestly—You Shouldn’t Have: Stuff and Stuff and Nonsense,” *Newsweek*, Dec. 3, 2001. (<http://www.mywire.com/pubs/Newsweek/2001/12/03/315388?extID=10037&oliID=229>).

Suggested Movies

Finding Forrester (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0181536/>)

Lord of the Rings Trilogy (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120737/>)

Blue Eyed (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115716/>)

Chapter 3

“Reordering the Cosmic Powers: Turning Tables at the Stone Table”

This chapter investigates the ‘deep magic’ of Christ’s atoning work. Christ’s atoning sacrifice breaks down divisions between God and us, and between us and others—including consumer divisions between different races and classes, making us all one in Christ. Metzger believes that in the present context, the fallen powers promote the individualization and commodification of life through consumerism. We must realize, however, that the fallen powers have lost their grip on us because of the new world order inaugurated by Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. By dying to his rights as both God and man, Jesus has transcended and transformed the powers. Metzger focuses on three ways in which Jesus turns the tables on the fallen powers. First, Jesus attacked and overcame the Roman rule of retribution by dying to himself as well as to evil—rather than retaliating for injustice and insults he suffered. Second, Jesus taught that the impersonal and legalistic use and distortion of the Jewish law is evil, as it separates Jews and Gentiles. Jesus suffered and triumphed over the evil distortion of the law. Metzger asserts that in promoting a consumerist mentality the church often fails to live out the New Testament’s abolition of divisions between groups. Third, and by extension of his atoning work, Jesus attacks consumerism and with it the notion that the church is an organization meant merely to satisfy our personal needs and desires. Churches that cater to market forces of homogeneity and upward mobility are exclusionary, thus diminishing the holistic message of the gospel. As the body of Christ, we are not meant to be choosers and consumers, but to be chosen and consumed by Christ, who transforms our desires, mobilizing the church to become downwardly mobile—partnering with the downtrodden in their oppression. Metzger believes that when the Holy Spirit turns the tables on our own sinfulness—cleansing us and transforming us—we no longer have reason to retreat into the comfort and safety of homogeneity, but can begin to restructure ourselves and our world to reflect the values of Christ and his kingdom.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. How does Christ's death and resurrection reconfigure the victimizer and the victim?
2. Metzger writes that consumerism leads to structures of individualism and commodification within the church. How do you see consumerism having an impact on the way Christianity presents itself in the Western world? How does consumerism have an impact on your church?
3. How do you see Christ's community formed by his atoning work combating structures caused by consumerism?
4. According to Metzger, churches that foster consumerist impulses are ultimately exclusionary—intentionally or not. In light of a holistic understanding of Christ's atoning work, how could one move forward in breaking down race and class divisions within the church?
5. Metzger wrestles with the idea that as the body of Christ we are his chosen people. How does the paradigm shift of being "chosen" rather than being "choosers" impact the way you think of the church?

Application

1. Make a commitment with your group not to buy anything new for yourself for the next three months. Journal about your experience and share it with your group.
2. Wear clothes to your church that do not fit the 'target market' of your congregation and observe how people respond to you.

Suggested Reading

G. B. Caird. *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956; reprint, with a foreword by L.D. Hurst, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003.

Brad Harper. "Christus Victor, Postmodernism, and the Shaping of Atonement Theology," *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2005).

Paul Louis Metzger. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice and the Savior of the World: Space, Time and Structural Evil." *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2003).

Jürgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Leon Morris. “Atonement, Theories of the,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

Suggested Movies

The Green Mile (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120689/>)

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe
(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0363771/>)

Chapter 4

“Reordering the Christian’s Life: The Supernatural Shakeup”

In this chapter, Metzger makes his case for the necessity of a ‘supernatural shakeup’ in evangelical Christianity. This involves the replacement of the individualistic, consumer-oriented gospel with the realization that the gospel turns us inside out and upside down to love holistically, as God loves. This chapter focuses on two positive contributions that historic evangelical theology makes to overcoming race and class divides in the church and wider culture. First, Metzger stresses the importance of conversion/regeneration, in that we are reconciled with God through his initiative of loving grace poured out on us through the Spirit. Second, he highlights the importance of the reformation of human relationships, where we are reconciled with each other through the overflowing of God’s love in our relations. Metzger explains that the vertical and horizontal dimensions of spirituality constitute the Christian faith. Evangelical forbear, Jonathan Edwards, modeled well this theological constitution. Neglecting the importance of the vertical relationship with God can lead to moralism, while neglecting the horizontal relationship with our fellow humans can lead to escapism. Metzger describes how conversion and reformation should address moralism and escapism as they relate to race and class divisions. A change of heart is central to defeating moralism. Without the regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit one will never serve God through one’s actions (only self), no matter how well-intentioned. Authentic Christian action is the overflowing response to God’s love poured out in believers’ hearts through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

Metzger believes that Christian escapism is largely a reflection of the larger culture’s narcissistic spirit. We have become more concerned with protecting our own personal security and material prosperity than living out the gospel of love and reconciliation in the Christian community and wider culture. When we live in light of God’s triune reality and when his Spirit indwells our hearts, we are formed into persons in communion, who live and love as Christ loves. Metzger realizes though, that in addition to overcoming moralism and escapism, we must also convert the consumer structures that divide us from each other. He cites Martin Luther King, Jr. as exemplifying the application of Jesus’ love ethic as a potent instrument for overcoming and transforming oppressive structures. While King’s work succeeded in many ways, his work is not finished; for the oft invisible structures of consumer-oriented segregation continue to divide us. Metzger believes that converting consumer structures inside and outside the evangelical church as well as converting consumerist souls is necessary to realize King’s dream, and to embody Christ’s gospel of reconciliation. This leads him to draw attention to certain practices in the remaining chapters.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. Metzger expresses the need for a supernatural shakeup, which includes being flipped upside down (horizontal dimension) and turned inside out (vertical dimension). What is the order given for this supernatural shakeup according to the author? And why?
2. Define moralism and escapism in your own terms. According to Metzger, what is the safeguard to *moralism* and *escapism*?
3. What do you think is the difference between a person practicing moralism and a person who is moral? How does the Trinity make a difference in defeating moralism and escapism? Reflect upon John 15:5, Romans 5:5, and 1 Corinthians 13 in answering these questions.
4. In what ways has *escapism* shaped evangelical college age and young adult small groups? How does escapism relate to the concept of Sartre's play *No Exit* (98)?
5. Who is our neighbor according to Henri Nouwen and Jesus in his parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) (104)? What difference should this make in our lives?
6. Metzger argues that personal conversion through the Holy Spirit works itself out in genuine reconciliation with others and leads to a downwardly mobile ethic. Do you believe this is always the case? Why or why not? How does this fit with what Jesus says about the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46?

Application

1. Reflect on why you do what you do. What is it that drives you in your decision making? What can be traced to moralism? Are there areas of your life where your spirituality is escapist?
2. Ask three people in your church why they came to church this week. Reflect upon what they shared in view of Scripture and this text. What stood out to you?

Suggested Reading

Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, in *Ethical Writings*. Ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 8. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Jonathan Edwards. *Religious Affections*. Ed. John E. Smith, vol. 2. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

Ron Frost. "High Pressure Zone Spirituality." *Cultural Encounters* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 65-80.

Martin Luther. *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Ed. Timothy Lull. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.

Suggested Movies

Amazing Grace (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454776/>)

End of the Spear (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0399862/>)

To End All Wars (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0243609/>)

Chapter 5

“Reordering the Church: Recovering the Lost Ark”

Here Metzger focuses on recovering evangelical Christianity’s ‘lost Ark’ by restoring Scripture and the sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper, for the purpose of confronting and consuming race and class divisions within the church. Restoring the Ark means reordering church polity around the Bible and the Lord’s Table in order to expose and overcome our divisions. Metzger sets out to discuss how the Ark has been eclipsed by the modern trade triangle of consumerism, homogeneity, and upward mobility, how it can be restored to its rightful position, and how this restoration is important in overcoming race and class barriers in the consumer-oriented church. With regard to reconfiguring the church in light of Scripture, Metzger observes that the pre-modern biblical worldview that saw God’s story as framing our human story has been replaced by a modern relativistic worldview that sees the biblical narrative as one option of many in the marketplace of ideas. Additionally, Metzger asserts that we need to reconfigure sacred space around the sacraments. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are essential to the church’s identity and kingdom mission, but too often they have been displaced from prominence to make seekers feel more comfortable; in doing so the church has sacrificed its true identity as a worshipping and witnessing kingdom community. Metzger sees the consumer church’s acceptance of affinity grouping as creating an exclusionary social ladder that is masked under the pretense of consumer preference. The church has done little to bring in the have-nots to the family feast of the Lord’s Supper because we would rather keep them at a distance. Furthermore, Metzger offers some suggestions for how to restructure the way we present and practice the Lord’s Supper, so as to make it an inclusive event and emphasize its centrality to church identity. Recovering the lost Ark in Christian worship and witness is essential to overcoming race and class barriers in the church. The preaching of the Word must move people beyond their consumer addictions and their race and class affinity groups. We are to become a ‘consumed people’ when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together, participating in Christ’s body and overcoming barriers between others and ourselves.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. “Recovering the Lost Ark” is used as a metaphor to describe a way of being in the world as the church. What is meant by calling the church a “sacred space” that is opened up by Christ’s victory? What ought to be taking place in that space?
2. A pre-modern way of reading the Bible sees the narrative of the Bible consuming the reader rather than the reader trying to fit the bible into her life. What is the author envisioning by this “overarching and participational frame of reference”? (113). How has the black church in America often been an example of this way of reading?
3. What does a sacrament do? How can a recovery of the vitality of the church’s practices of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper give the church a clearer sense of its identity as a distinct social space over against the oppressive structures of society?
4. What is the difference between the body of Christ and a fraternity? How does the Lord’s Supper mandate a loving solidarity across economic and racial boundaries?
5. What is so crucial about the sacraments in the church’s call to be transformed from a consuming people (*homo consumens*) into a consumed people (*homo consumendus*)? Why is it not enough to simply think about the issue, and make up our minds to think differently?

Application

1. Hopefully this section has presented the church as the key to the solution to its own problem through a recovery of its core practices of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. What application could there be, then, other than to go to church regularly and participate wholeheartedly?
2. Share your food at potlucks. Sit next to people you don’t know at church and invite them out or over to dinner, even (especially!) if they belong to a different economic, racial, or consumer-niche group.
3. Pray that your church would receive such an overwhelming confirmation of its identity from the all-consuming love of Jesus that it would have no need to attempt to find its value by marketing itself as offering the best available religious goods and services, or by achieving name recognition among its competitors, or where its members attempt to find value from the products they buy.

Suggested Reading

William Cavanaugh. “The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics.” *Word and World* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

William Cavanaugh. *Theopolitical Imagination*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 2002.

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” in Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight: The Great Sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.

Richard Lischer. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999.

John Howard Yoder. *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Suggested Movies

Raiders of the Lost Ark (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082971/>)

Romero (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098219/>)

Chapter 6

“Reordering the Church’s Outreach: Overcoming Market Forces and Building Beloved Community”

This chapter focuses on ways that churches can overcome market forces that foster race and class divisions by becoming partners with other churches and the broader society to build beloved community. Metzger asserts that the commodity-oriented model of church segregates churches internally and externally by catering to consumer desires for homogeneity and upward mobility. Christians today need a church model that reflects the communal and co-missional nature of the triune God—a model based on building personal relationships and external partnerships to break down race and class divisions. The church must see its task as a truly religious one: to seek the healing of the personal and public spheres of life before God, including race and class divisions. Rather than being a static location dispensing spiritual goods and services, the church is to be active in rebinding the brokenness of the world. To this end Metzger focuses on John Perkins’ principles of relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution. Metzger believes that personal and communal self-examination in view of the Lord’s Supper will lead to relocation, which will involve a repositioning of ministry vision and will also lead to redistribution. Metzger addresses five aspects of redistribution: 1) need; 2) responsibility and blame; 3) resources; 4) ownership; and 5) glory. Redistribution of need means understanding our shared need for each other. We should humbly minister *with* those of different racial or economic backgrounds, appreciating that they have as much to offer us as we do them. Redistribution of responsibility and blame means seeing our corporate responsibility for the sins of humanity. Unless we see ourselves as responsible for the inequalities in society we will never truly have a heart for reconciliation. Redistribution of resources involves sharing our talents, facilities, time, and money with those in need. We are to be partners in spreading the gospel, not competitors. Redistribution of ownership means sharing control of business enterprises with those in the community. Paraphrasing Perkins’ view on ownership, ‘it is good to teach a man to fish, but it is more important to give him ownership of the pond.’ Redistribution of glory entails giving glory to God, not ourselves. The focus of our worship and witness ought to be the triune God, not our church programs, music, preaching, facilities, and the like. Metzger’s ‘all-consuming vision for cooperation’ is that when we are truly consumed by Christ through the indwelling Spirit and the communal celebration of the Lord’s Supper churches will work together to overcome market forces and relocate, reconcile, and redistribute on a variety of levels. Such labors of love will take place in the Christian community and in the wider society as the church bears witness to a nobler vision of the gospel.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. How does the Trinitarian nature of God impact your understanding of the church as a communal and co-missional community, in contrast to a commodity-oriented one?
2. How does the communal and co-missional model of the church move us beyond being a social club where people only associate with those like them, and how does it safeguard us from commodifying people as mere consumers?
3. What difference does the whole church being present to each local assembly have on race and class division in the church?
4. Which of the three R's (reconciliation, relocation, and redistribution) do you think is the hardest to apply, and why?
5. How can someone who is different culturally and economically from you minister to you in profound ways? How do you need those who are different from you?
6. How can a Christian business owner work with his church to apply a redistribution of ownership in his or her community? How is redistribution of ownership different from charity?
7. What do you think God is calling you to redistribute? How do you believe you will benefit from participating in redistribution?

Application

1. Who has ministered to you recently? Are they from your same social class and culture? This week share a meal with people from another ethnic or economic background, and reflect upon how they minister to you. For many, this could mean learning from a wealthy business owner. For others, it may entail asking a homeless person to lunch.
2. While celebrating communion this Sunday, imagine the reality that the whole church is present there with you, rich and poor, black and white, male and female. Journal your experience, and share your reflections with a friend.

Suggested Reading

Marva J. Dawn. *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Mark DeYmaz. *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim. *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street. *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997; reprint, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2003.

Lesslie Newbigin. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

John M. Perkins. *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.

John M. Perkins. *With Justice for All*. Ventura: Regal Books, 1982.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Free to be Bound: Church Beyond the Color Line*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008.

Suggested Movies

The Mission (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091530/>)

The Second Chance (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091530/>)

Conclusion

“A Nobler Vision of Patchwork Quilts and Church Potlucks”

Metzger concludes by returning to the story he shared in his introduction about the article in *The Willamette Week* magazine that described evangelical Christianity. He believes that based on the article and positions taken in popular culture, evangelicalism often communicates a patchwork quilt filled with images of a surreal and sappy Jesus, who “on the one hand entertains warlike ambitions and on the other hand pursues the American dream of life, liberty, leisure, and happiness.” In seeking to counter this message, Metzger asks: “What images of Jesus and his kingdom do we wish to construct and convey?” He relates his own experiences of dialoguing with Buddhists to clear up misunderstandings and overcome fear between the Right and Left for the gospel’s sake. The Buddhists’ response was that Christians ought to have the ‘corner on compassion’ with our belief that God came to earth to become one of us and identify with us in our brokenness. Metzger believes that in embracing the contemporary version of the slave trade triangle of consumerism, homogeneity, and upward mobility, the evangelical church has settled for table scraps, rather than feasting at the eternally satisfying banquet Jesus has prepared for us out of his great love. As a movement, we often convey to the broader public that we are consumed with taking back America rather than with laying down our lives for America as Christ-followers consumed by Christ’s love. Metzger longs for the evangelical church to be captured by a more noble vision of the Christian faith, and speaks of the need for its patchwork quilt to be comprised of people offering their lives for each other, giving of themselves rather than taking, and gaining more than they ever expected—in loving Christ, the church, and all God’s image bearers. We need to take part in Christ’s kingdom work, rather than keeping it at arm’s length. Metzger believes that only when our outreach programs reach *us* for Christ will we truly experience the kingdom of God in our midst. He concludes with his vision of Christ’s eschatological banquet table, where there is room for all, and where we will be surprised at some of the odd couples dining together, whom we did not expect to be sitting together. Christ will do away with all divisions, and all those who are truly captured by Christ’s love will bring their unique contributions to the banquet table to share with all who are gathered there. Metzger’s ultimate vision is God’s triune action in the world, where God spreads his love abroad in our hearts and where we are vessels through which that love is poured out on ‘the other,’ whoever that may be. Only the triune God’s all-consuming love envisioned and realized at his banqueting table can sustain us in the struggle against the fallen powers of consumerism, providing us with liberating faith and hope to build beloved community as God’s kingdom witnesses.

Questions to inspire discussion

1. What images of Jesus and his kingdom do you think the church should convey? What will it take and cost us to get there? What did it cost Jesus (see John 13)?
2. Metzger wants the evangelical church to reframe and expand its iconography and theological imagination. Among other things, “iconography” deals with those we esteem and pattern our lives after in our mutual pursuit of Christ (Paul told Christians to follow his example as he followed Christ—1 Cor. 11:1). “Theological imagination” deals with that which we hope for and aspire to in view of Christ’s kingdom vision and mission. Upon reading the book, what contemporaries will you follow in pursuit of Christ, and why? How is God reframing and expanding your theological imagination? Why is that revision and expansion beautiful to you?
3. How should our understanding of the Lord’s Supper *as communion* help us get beyond divisions in churches and divisions between various church traditions?
4. How do the Lord’s Supper and the vision of the eschatological banquet confront our fear of scarcity (reflect upon Luke 12 in your answer)?
5. If you had an opportunity to cast a vision of what evangelical Christianity’s patchwork quilt patterned after Jesus’ likeness should look like, what would it be? What are some of the profound patches being created by the church in your local community?

Application

1. Make a patchwork quilt that represents your church’s outreach in the community. Create a separate patch for each of the ways your church is conveying Christ to your community and the world. Display the patchwork quilt in your church lobby.
2. Encourage your church leaders to find another congregation in your community that is made up of another race or class *with* which you can partner. Begin your partnership by celebrating the Lord’s Supper with one another.

Suggested Reading

Shane Claiborne. *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2006.

Donald Miller. *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.

Timothy C. Morgan. “Purpose Driven in Rwanda.” *Christianity Today* (October 2005).

Jann S. Wenner. “Bono: The Rolling Stone Interview.” *Rolling Stone* (Nov. 3, 2005).

Suggested Movies

Joyeux Noël (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0424205/>)

Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream”
(<http://www.youtube.com/v/t8AygXxmgFM&hl=en>).