



Summing Up and Implications

We have focused on three themes: First, **Christendom**, its decline, and the challenges and opportunities that come with that change; second, **modernity** and the emerging post-modern era and the challenges and opportunities that come with this cultural shift; and third, **the dynamics and nature of organizations**, their resilience and rigidity. While I've noted some implications of these changes as we've gone along, I want to summarize them in this concluding section of our course.

We no longer live in American Christendom, in which the culture, Christian faith, and the church were all woven together in mutually supportive ways. We live in an officially secular, religiously pluralistic, and diverse North American society. I can think of the following implications of this shift, and you may think of others:

- During Christendom we kind of forgot how to change lives in a deep, Jesus-centered way, because we assumed that everyone was already Christian. Implication: we need to rediscover the meaning of transformation, for ourselves, for others, and as central to the church's life and purpose. The church exists to change lives and to heal people.
- During Christendom we focused the church's teaching ministry on children and called it "Christian education," because we figured everyone was already Christian and simply needed information. Implication: it's time to re-learn Christian formation for all ages, especially adults and to rediscover the joy of faith as a life-long and ever deepening journey.
- During Christendom we came to think a lot of our focus should be on maintaining and supporting the church as an institution, while "mission" was thought of as mostly far away or charity at home. Implication: Today the mission field is all around us and everything the church does is mission. We are called to connect to the community and witness to the gospel in word and deed right there.
- As moderns, we tended to make Christianity rational and reasonable and we particularly emphasized the moral aspect of Christianity. Implication: Spirituality, the experience of God and God's grace, is the basis of Christian life and morality, and needs to be rediscovered in powerful worship, preaching and sacraments, in prayer, in small groups, and in spiritual practices.
- As moderns, we tried to make Christianity universal, something that all rational people would find useful and acceptable. Implication: we are free in this new time to enjoy the oddity of Christianity, the way Jesus doesn't fit in, the way Jesus and his followers are different people who know a different story and a different Lord.

- As people negotiating a new world, we value our churches, their history and ways, but we are not captives to the past or to the ways things have always been done. Implication: the present is a time for trying new things, some of which will work and some of which may fail, but even if the latter does happen we can learn from flops. Instead of being “the frozen chosen” a new time invites us to become risk-takers and innovators.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Of the six implications I have listed, which excites you most and why?
2. Of the six which concerns you most and why?
3. What questions do you have about any of these implications?
4. Name a seventh implication you see in the new world in which God has placed us.

For Further Reading

Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture*, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) and *What’s Theology Got to Do With It: Convictions, Vitality and the Church*, (Alban, 2006). These books by the author of this course, who is a U.C.C. pastor, further develop these ideas and their implications for congregations.

www.anthonibrobinson.com Website of author, with weekly on-line newsletter, “What’s Tony Thinking?” and weekly text study, “Common Reading.”

Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (Jossey-Bass, 2001) and *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (Jossey-Bass, 2003). McLaren is especially helpful in understanding the post-modern world and sensibility.

C. Kirk Hadaway, *Behold I Do a New Thing: Transforming Communities of Faith*, (Pilgrim Press, 2001). Hadaway provides a great overall view with special attention to the purpose of the church.

www.easumbandy.com This is the website for William Easum and Tom Bandy, well known church consultants. By clicking on “FAQ” you can access a wealth of resources.

Michael W. Foss, *Powersurge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*, (Abingdon/Fortress, 2000). Foss, a Lutheran pastor, frames the change from a membership to a discipleship culture.

Anthony (“Tony”) B. Robinson is a United Church of Christ pastor who has served four congregations, most recently as Senior Minister of Plymouth Congregational Church (UCC) in Seattle, Washington from 1990-2004. He is a graduate of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City.