UNDERSTANDING THE SUBJECTIVITIES OF PASTORS AND BELIEFS ABOUT THE CURRENT AMERICAN CHURCH CULTURE

by

MICHAEL ELLIS ANDERSON
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the spiritual subjectivities of pastors in the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church in the context of American capitalism. The Evangelical church carries extreme amounts of power and influence in shaping the beliefs of individuals in American society. However, very little pointed research of pastors' spiritual subjectivities that guide their teachings and views in this sub-sect of church culture is present in academia. Anthropology, along with other disciplines, often focuses on dominant churches from an etic perspective of politics and power relations without fully considering the spiritual beliefs of pastors. This etic perspective can miss the deeply interwoven factors, including understanding of the Scriptures and pastors' roles in their congregations, challenges associated with religious consumerist competition, and conceptualizations of church "success" that shape pastors subjectivities, and in turn help shape American Christian culture. Pastors navigate the tension between the broader capitalistic social forces and their spiritual and Biblical beliefs as many pastors of the church aim to change the unquestioned adherence to these ideals. Building on my seven years of experience as a pastor in the Orlando area and drawing on current research with a group of Evangelical pastors, I demonstrate in this study that although capitalistic social forces shape many ideals of individuals in the American Evangelical church culture, understanding pastors' spiritual subjectivities is crucial when investigating the influence of the church in America.

To G-D

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, religious organizations have had major impacts on the people and cultures surrounding them. The power that religious organizations have to shape the thoughts and behaviors of the masses connected with them on views such as politics, moral norms, and money cannot be underestimated. While these religious institutions can variously influence the current of culture, they are also susceptible to the current of culture influencing the compass of religious thought. Quite simply, religious institutions and culture have a reciprocal influence. Based on my seven years of experience as a local pastor, this interpenetrative influence seems to manifest itself in the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church of America, which has been receptive to dominant cultural norms that exalt capitalism, rather than standing apart from the dominant culture in valuing humility and serving the poor, as it is taught in the Bible. The apparent emergence of economic gains and spiritual impenitency raises numerous questions: (1) does the hegemonic culture of capitalism influence the direction of the organized Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church in America?; (2) if so, does the Church depart from biblical teachings and practices of core values of humility and helping the poor conveyed in the Bible?; and, (3) how is the tension between these seemingly conflicting values understood in the subjectivities of pastors?

Defining the Church: Pastors, Culture, and Organization

It is useful to begin by defining what the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church is and the different contexts in which it is discussed in this study. I define the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church as consisting of several denominations in

suburban white middle class America. I am not speaking of a singular denomination here, but rather any Evangelical church where the make up of membership is predominantly white individuals in the socioeconomic middle class. Another precursor for fitting into this definition is that the pastor themselves are white middle class men. The reason I focus on this particular sect of the Evangelical church is the strong influence that it has in the overall formation and ideology of the greater American church culture, as well as the influence it has on business. Many of the individuals in this sect of the Evangelical church are local, national, and international business leaders. These two influences in church culture and business are important in understanding the Evangelical church culture as a whole.

Secondly, it is also useful to define different elements of the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church. Throughout this thesis when I refer to pastors, I am speaking specifically of the white pastors in suburban white middle class churches. While these are not the only voices in the Evangelical church, they are the voices I will focus on in this study. Next, when I refer to the "church culture" I am referencing the individuals comprising congregations the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church culture. Again, these individuals do not make up all of the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church. Finally, when I speak of the "church organization" I am referring to the not-for-profit church organizations that comprise the Mainstream White Middle Class Evangelical Church culture. These are the frameworks and definitions that I will refer to from now on throughout this study.

<u>The Developing Anthropology of Christianity</u>

This study aims to explore the subjective perspectives and experiences of pastors in Evangelical church culture in how they conceptualize their roles as pastors and leaders, how they define success for themselves and their congregations, and what are current problems and challenges they experience in their cultural context. However, for a long time the topic of Christianity has been left out of anthropological discourse; in fact anthropology and theology have had an awkward relationship. As Fanella Cannell states in the introduction of *The Anthropology of Christianity,* "While anthropology proceeded from the examination of "primitive" religions to the analysis of world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the study of Christian areas of the world was, generally, considered the least urgent object to study" (2006:8). More specifically, pastors that are the leaders of this segment of culture have been poorly understood and addressed in the studies of social forces. Christianity has simply been labeled as a result of cultural influences rather than standing alone as a 'thing' with the faith of these leaders directing this culture. As anthropologists John Barker states in his article *Toward an Anthropology of Christianity*:

> Christianity surely ranks among the most studied and debated phenomena in human history. Although not entirely ignoring it—a near impossibility given the extent of Christian penetration in many areas where ethnographers traditionally carried out fieldwork—anthropologists were slow to focus directly on Christianity as an object of research in its own right (2008:377).

The goal of this research is to address the dearth of literature on this topic and make additions, not only to area of Christian literature, but the anthropology of Christianity literature. Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in understanding Christianity from the standpoint of anthropology. Anthropologist Joel Robbins demonstrates this trend in his article *Anthropology*

and Theology: An Awkward Relationship? when he says,

> Although the trend is still quite new, certainly no more than a decade old, it is hard to miss the growing anthropological interest in Christianity. A topic that was once a complete non-starter in disciplinary conversations, Christianity has become of late a subject one can raise without fear of eliciting blank looks or raised eyebrows. As an object of ethnographic attention, at least, Christianity is on its way to becoming established, its worthiness or attention taken for granted (2006:285).

This is an encouraging trend as anthropologists explore Christianity as an individual culture in its own framework and context, and understand that this framework changes and morphs throughout time.

Unfortunately, as Barker (2008) states, Christianity has been slow to be accepted as its own area suitable for research attention in the field of anthropology. For a long time, Christianity has been outside of this consideration in anthropology and this lack of consideration may be due to the drastic differences in spiritual beliefs and scholastic understandings. For example, in the article *Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity*, Robbins (2007) discusses how there are drastically different constructions for models of change between Christianity and anthropology. In Christianity, the model of change for faithful Christians is a radical spiritual transformation that shapes their lives, whereas anthropologists often try to explain this radical spiritual change as shaped by the Christian's culture. Therefore, as Robbins argues, unless anthropology begins to reconsider the way that it approaches Christianity, it will not have the conceptual tools to understand the elements of Christianity fully.

Since the focus on the anthropology of Christianity has grown recently, one needs to understand the previous conceptual constructs within which anthropology operated when framing Christianity as an area of study. Two prominent perspectives on the study of religion

have been symbolic and materialist. Cultural Materialism, a theory developed by anthropologist

Marvin Harris (1979), explains religion as the product of infrastructure, i.e., material needs such

as modes of production, reproduction, and economic needs. Given this study's focus on the emic

perspective of the pastors, it may be useful to look at the way that symbolic anthropologist

Clifford Geertz describes religion as a cultural system in his seminal article *Religion as a*

Cultural System (1993). He states that a *religion* is:

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-
> lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general
> order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of
> factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (1993:90).

As Robbins suggests, anthropology has often confined Christianity to an area that is created and

defined by the culture in which one lives, and not necessarily as an object to study in and of

itself. According to Robbins, the assumption that religions are simply culturally constructed

systems can be misleading because it neglects the very important aspect of religions: spiritual

belief and faith. Therefore, to follow Geertz's assertion, cultural systems of religion exist and are

shaped by the broader culture.

Thus, rather than viewing Christianity as a cultural system alone, it is useful to analyze

how Christianity in imbedded within the American society. While cultural influences often have

significant impact on how Christianity is shaped in a given society, individuals, specifically

pastors who are leaders of this religious sect, have a significant impact on the direction and

construction of Christian ideals.

Anthropologists often look only at the cultural influences on Christianity, rather than

looking at how the leaders of Christianity shape it as seen in Colleen McDannell's article

Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America (1995). McDannell discusses

the influence of materialism on Christianity in America. Through her anthropological analysis of Christianity and materialism, she addresses the infusion of materialism into the religious practices of faithful Christians, but leaves unexplored the influence of materialism as understood by pastors teaching their congregations about materialism (1995). This study's examination of pastors' spiritual subjectivities begins to address this oversight.

Defining Subjectivities

The term subjectivity is used frequently in the field of anthropology as both a theoretical and methodological framework. In this study, I use the term subjectivity in somewhat of a different manner than most anthropologists in the past. However, before I can clarify my definition, it is useful to understand it from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner defines this concept in her book titled *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* by stating, "By subjectivity I mean the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects" (2006:107). According to Ortner, subjectivity encompasses everything psychological that controls the actions and behaviors of an acting subject.

The common use of the term subjectivity is to understand how a dominated subject responds to the structural forces that oppress him or her. Anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann discusses in his article titled *Subjectivity* that, "subjectivity implies the emotional experience of a political subject, the subject caught up in a world of violence, state authority and pain, the subject's distress under the authority of another" (2006:346). This statement by Luhrmann indicates that often subjectivity viewed with respect how an individual under political authority

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experiences that influences and how she or he conceptualizes the world from within that set of constraints. However, I argue that not every individual's construct is found within "distress under authority of another," as Luhrmann says above.

Ortner, as well as other anthropologists, focuses on the psychological and emotional aspects experienced by individuals in the context of political tensions when she refers to 'subjectivity.' Although politics play a significant role in every person's construction of subjectivity, individuals are not suppressed in political struggles in a one-way manner. In their article titled *Ethnographic Studies of Positioning and Subjectivity: An Introduction* (2004), Dorothy Holland and Kevin Leander point to the fact that subjectivities and social practices suggest that social phenomena and individuals influence each other simultaneously in a two-way, reciprocal manner. They state, "Social practice theory insists that we somehow understand how social phenomena are simultaneously phenomena of the person and vice versa. It calls for language that goes beyond units that are mainly social, mainly psychological or mainly cultural" (2004:137). However, many anthropologists focus more on the political influences and struggles rather than the individual and his or her understanding of deeply personal but also social phenomena, for example, religiosity (2004).

This research seeks to examine and understand the spiritual subjectivities of pastors in how they conceptualize their roles as leaders and how they shape the congregations they lead through these conceptualizations. This project is a small step toward addressing the gaps in the anthropological scholarship in this area. In understanding this culture, anthropologists will be able to look at the political influences of Christianity and the subjectivities of those influences form within culture. Likewise, until the pastors are generally understood in how they form

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subjectivities, the Christian culture will never fully be understood holistically.

Anthropology is considered to be the study of diversity of people and their cultures. Religion and religious practices are often crucial aspects of not only individual life, but of the life of the community and the culture as a whole. Christian culture constitutes a significant element in the American life, and many people still consider America to be a "Christian nation," although that is debated and contested by many. While many scholars have studied the peripheral areas of fundamentalism and the Prosperity Gospel[1] or Word of Faith movement[2], few sought to examine the powerful culture of the dominant American Evangelical Christianity, specifically pastors. The topic of Mainstream Christian culture has been left for pastors and writers inside of Christianity to discuss yet it affects the pastors of America in deep and intimate ways. Therefore, I approach this project from the dual position of an etic academic point of view, as well as from a "native" ethnographer's perspective. As can be expected, "native" ethnographers often faced the challenge of particular biases that can manifest as assumptions in the course of data collection. My awareness of this challenge led me to design my interview guides very carefully in order to ensure that all relevant and direct questions were included in the in-depth interviews. As a pastor, I did not want my emic point of view to influence my findings, therefore I attempted to set aside any biases throughout this research project and maintain my awareness of potential assumptions during each interview and in the data analysis phase.

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[1] This is a popular theology, specifically in lower socio-economic areas in America that centers around the teachings that God favors and materially blesses those that he favors. This theology states that God blesses believers with riches and these riches are obtained with positive faith confessions and repayment for tithe and gifts faithfully given.
[2] The Word of Faith Movement is often confused with the Prosperity Gospel Movement. Although similar in some theological teachings, this theology often referred to as the "Name it and Claim it" theology. This theology says that if a person believes the Word of God and confesses it, then they will receive what they confess (often times economic focused confessions).

Discontent Inspired Inquiry

I did not accidently stumble upon this study; I actively sought it out. Although I did not understand the theoretical concept of subjectivity before I entered into this study, I ultimately decided to pursue this topic as a result of a growing discontent with church organizations. Even as a cultural insider and a pastor, I did not understand much of what I saw emphasized in church organizations, as what I saw and heard was contradictory.

My friend Richard and I sat down at a Starbucks to catch up since we had not seen each other in several months. Unfortunately, Richard had just been laid off from the church organization where he had worked with for more than a decade. He was not fired for disciplinary reasons or lack of production; in fact he had worked harder and more faithfully than most other pastors I know. He was laid off because of budgetary reasons. His congregation had struggled to make the projected budget during the recession in 2007-2009. However, the same church organization that fired my friend Richard, along with several other productive pastors for budget reasons, was considering a multi-million dollar building fund for construct a new church building. This inconsistency did not make sense to me. This church was firing mid-level staff, putting them in precarious financial situations, ostensibly because they did not have the budget to keep them. Yet they were thinking about constructing another building. This situation sounded more like a business trying to cut operating costs to improve the bottom line, rather than how Christ teaches the church to care for others in the Bible. Confused and a growing in discontentment with church organizations, I began this research project with frustration toward many American church organizations operate. However, my discontentment changed as this project evolved.

Preparing for Research

I have been thinking about and internalizing issues that I personally see in American church culture for several years now. What happened to my friend Richard propelled me in striving to comprehend the subjectivities of pastors from a deeper and more informed position. If I continued to remain frustrated with church culture, I knew that I could not persist in my role as a pastor. Instead of leaving my vocation, I decided to study the trends that are prevalent among some pastors in the Orlando area. I hoped by understanding how other pastors processed these issues that I was struggling with, I would be able to experience the peace of mind that would enabled me to continue as a pastor.

As a pastor myself, I understood that bringing up issues of prosperity and capitalism could be controversial when meeting with these pastors. I know that often pastors can be overly positive about church culture. Thus, I started this research process by performing an in-depth literature review of numerous fields. I felt comfortable speaking with pastors about issues in church culture, but I needed to understand more about social phenomena and forces from an anthropological perspective. Once I had gained a better comprehension of social forces through the lens of anthropology, I began to engage in conversations about my topic with some of my friends that are currently pastors as a way to prepare for this project. They had positive reactions to my inquiry into these issues.

Equipped with knowledge gained from my years of experience as a pastor, the in-depth literature review, and conversations with my pastoral friends, I began to call and set up interviews with 20 pastors around the Orlando area. Initially I thought it was going to be difficult

obtaining interviews with pastors, but in fact I only had a few pastors not return my phone calls or emails. In contacting pastors, I communicated that I was a youth minister and an anthropology student trying to understand cultural influences on the church. They obliged to meet with me and many said they would do anything they could to help a student further his or her education. After contacting pastors and setting up interviews, I began my research expecting to have all of my questions answered.

Literature Review

There is very limited scholarship in all academia disciplines that focus on pastors involved in and lead church cultures. The limited amount of academic attention in anthropology has left significant gaps in the anthropological scholarship on the topic of the subjectivities of pastors in the church culture. Therefore, in order to achieve a more comprehensive literature review, I explored other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and even popular Christian authors for insight into this topic. However, finding literature in any of these fields that focuses specifically on the pastors' subjectivities is very difficult. The extant literature focuses on two extremes of study regarding American Evangelical cultures: fundamentalists and prosperity teachers. Grasping an understanding of these drastically different sects of Christian Evangelicalism establishes a good starting point for framing the subjectivities of pastors.

Christian Fundamentalism and The Prosperity Gospel Defined

Throughout recent years anthropologists, such as Susan Harding in *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (2000), have studied cultures of fundamental Baptists and the extreme Religious Right.

Also, the Word of Faith Movement, or what is popularly known as the prosperity gospel has been examined in the ethnography titled *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Harrison 2005). However, there has been little depth of study on in academia that focuses on the particular sample of white, middle class pastors that this study aims to understand, which stands in significant contrast to the groups examined in these ethnographies. Furthermore, the influence of capitalism has not been considered in the context of this new wave of American church members. This gap in anthropological knowledge is one that this study addresses.

Susan Harding in her ethnography *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politic* (2000) and in her article *Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion* (1987) studies and illustrates the political discourses of those in fundamentalist Baptist cultures, and in the latter, she explores the use of language as the way of conversion in this group. As she talks with a disciple of Jerry Falwell, the leader of the Moral Majority movement, she senses how powerful the use of language is in their culture, as she concludes, "Among fundamental Baptist, speaking is believing" (Harding 1987:179). This observation sums up the importance of language and convincing someone that they need to convert in Christian fundamentalism. Harding also follows Jerry Falwell's life and how he helped to grow the Fundamental Baptist Movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Harding 2000). Falwell helped to establish the Moral Majority and Liberty Baptist College, along with a massive church body of over 20,000 people in his congregation and millions nationally on his TV program. Harding's biggest critique of Falwell is in how he constantly encouraged his followers to give through faith-based gifts and sacrificial giving. He asked for these many times throughout his

tenure as pastor and college president (2000). The question is whether these gifts were truly faith based or whether it was just an investment into an organization trying to make Christian morals the popular norm culturally and politically.

The Word of Faith Movement is covered in religious and social science academic studies even more frequently than that of fundamentalism, yet very few anthropologists have spent time investigating this area. Anthropologist Erica Bornstein wrote an insightful article that was published in *American Ethnologist* (2001), which addresses the mainstream Christian culture on the topic of child sponsorship through World Vision International. However, this article, while relevant to the mainstream Christian culture, focused more on the effects that child sponsorship has on those in Zimbabwe rather than on the dominant American Christian culture that gives to these children. While these studies are interesting and valuable, and discuss very visible areas of Christian church culture, they are not always comprehensive representations of the predominant culture that exists in Evangelical Christianity. Not being able to find many sources that helped me understand the mainstream Christian culture and its ties to capitalism in anthropology, led me to look into other academic disciplines. Many other disciplines have studied Christianity from a number of different perspectives, including sociology, history, business, and religious studies.

In the field of other social sciences, and especially sociology, a few readings were particularly helpful to illuminate the topic at hand. One of the most significant writings in this area is that of sociologist and political historian Max Weber in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). Weber examines how Calvinist reform created a mass movement toward the accumulation of wealth and trade that ultimately led to the formation of capitalism. In essence, Weber is suggesting that Protestants and their drive to work hard could have been a

crucial element that started the movement of capitalism and the exaltation of prosperity. The mainstream Christianity was in fact at the heart and beginning of capitalism and the culture of wealth accumulation. The accumulation of wealth appears to not have changed, and perhaps these ideals have only increased in American dominant culture (Weber 1958). There are other relevant readings in the field of sociology that also discuss the idea of prosperity in the dominant culture, specifically in Christianity (Bainbridge 1900, Clark 1965, Keister 2003, Shibley 1998, Stolow 2002). These authors take a less direct approach than that of Weber, but they have built upon his theory and suggestion of the Protestant Ethic taking root in American culture as well.

The field of religious studies has also produced some scholarship about mainstream American Christianity and its capitalistic ties and tendencies. Many of the articles in this discipline focus on the Word of Faith Movement, or as many within the mainstream Christian culture call it, the "prosperity gospel." These authors discuss the movement that seems to be gaining significant momentum in the American culture, specifically among lower socioeconomic and African American communities (Birman 1999, Harrison 2005, Lin 2007, Metzger 2007). While these findings directly inform my research project, the Word of Faith Movement is perceived as an extreme group that many Christians do not claim to associate. Therefore, while this movement is relevant to the overall influence in and of American Christian culture, it is still on the periphery of the mainstream culture that this project proposes to study.

Some authors in the area of religion discuss the market that is found for products in mainstream Christian culture (Carroll 2001, Roof 1999). These articles argue that there is a "market" geared specifically toward spiritual and religious cultures. Followers of faiths use the market to pursue their faith by buying small objects and books, to help them in their spiritual

journeys and understanding of their faith. These two authors also talk about how the baby boomers respond to religious culture (Carroll 2001, Roof 1999). These articles argue that religious culture has shifted from focusing on the spiritual to focusing on the individual and that it has become more about what the religion has to offer someone rather than how the religion can change one's life and lifestyle. Roger Haight and John Langan discuss the ethics that are involved in the social gospel and liberation theology, and proposes that frequently ministry and "truth" are compromised and changed, or watered down, so as to not offend anyone for fear that it could endanger the income of these priests (Haight 1990).

The idea of the social justice movement gaining momentum in much of Christianity has also been explored, along with the observation that there are strong political and cultural influences among evangelicals on American culture and US politics. Walter Mead (2006) argues this may not be a bad thing, as many evangelicals care more about social justice issues than political power. This article is very valuable in defining and comparing the three types of Christians found in American culture that are, as the author asserts, fundamentalist, liberal evangelicals, and evangelical Christians.

The last group of authors found in the field of religious studies may have been most important at helping me understand the influence of capitalism that is found in mainstream American Christianity. These authors discuss elements that are more prevalent in American Christianity today. One area is the definition of the "New Class" of Christians that are emerging in today's culture which look more like a version of popular culture than any form of mainstream Christianity (Schmalzbauer 1993). Another area of study is the consumerist culture that Christians have become today in American (Schmidt 1994). Schmidt discusses how Easter has

become more about people buying fancy clothes and colorful floral arrangements rather than the real meaning of Easter, which is to remember Jesus' resurrection. Similar assertions can be made about Christmas and other holidays. The final topic explored the idea of prosperity and wealth instead of thinking about the poor in today's society. Winston discusses the influence of the dominant culture on religion and Christianity in America and the role the media plays in this phenomenon, which leads to fueling the notion of the "American Dream" among Christians who want to conform to certain popular cultural norms (Winston 2007). These authors see a growing trend in the development of prosperity as a goal in mainstream Christian culture and the sense that many people are getting away from the faith in order to embrace popular culture. All of these authors have valuable insights into the predominant American Christianity and how it interacts with the current popular culture.

The final areas of academic study that I explored were the field of business and geography. In the field of business all of the authors discussed the question of how religion impacts the ethics by which Christian business owners run their businesses (Ali 2000 & 2005, Roels 1997). These articles show the impact of religion on individuals and how they lead to influences in the marketplace, but they do not focus on mainstream American Christianity. Geographer Michael Pacione argues that an alternative economic philosophy is needed to call into question the foundations of capitalism and prosperity in order for true ecclesiastical church to impact a community (1990). This is the very essence of the gospel oh which the church is formally based and that Jesus speaks about. As Pacione infers, this gospel is much different than the one of prosperity and capitalism that we increasingly see in today society.

The Prevailing Christian Discourse

The most prevalent and on-going discussions within American Christianity are conducted internally by writers, pastors, and leaders of the Evangelical community. Numerous authors and pastors within the Church, such as Shane Claiborne and Francis Chan, are starting to call into question the priority of money that is seen in church culture. In his book *The Irresistible Revolution: living as an ordinary radical* (2005), Shane Claiborne, a self-professed "new monastic" leader in Philadelphia, discusses what it would look like if the church refrained from emphasizing profits and from building large church buildings, and instead focused on giving to those in need that are poor, hungry, sick, and marginalized. He tells personal stories of his interactions with the very people, from Calcutta to Philadelphia, that Jesus, the one that Christians claim to follow, would be connecting with if he were on earth today (Claiborne 2005). Another author, and a pastor in southern California, that addresses this topic is Francis Chan. In his book *Crazy Love* (2008), Chan speaks of loving others above oneself and not worrying about getting all the "blessings" that we seek as Christians. Chan speaks numerous times of loving and giving to others in ways that goes against the dominant trend of focusing on the preservation of large buildings and the church organizations. Instead Chan challenges Christians to mimic their lives after Jesus' teachings and to live a life based off of these teachings more than what is currently seen in Christian culture today (Chan 2008).

Two more books that get to the heart of the issue at hand are *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices* by pastor Frank Viola and Christian researcher George Barna (2008), and *UnChristian: What a New Generation really Thinks about Christianity... and Why it Matters* by Christian cultural researchers David Kinnaman and Gabe

Lyons (2007). Viola and Barna explore in depth the practices of church culture and argue that most of the rituals that are seen are not even biblical, but have been influence by secular culture. They do an in depth historical study of the rituals that are practiced in current Christian culture and trace them back to the implementation of the Roman Catholic Church. Most of these practices are tied to Greek and Roman influences that can be seen to take effect after Constantine, who was Caesar, became a Christian and made Christianity the Roman state religion, as a political move to control the growing Christian sect in Rome. However, similar practices to Greek and Roman god and goddess worship overtook many of the rituals practiced by Christians prior to Constantine's order of making Rome a Christian empire. This shows that culture has much more impact on the culture of Christianity than Christianity has on the dominant culture, which reinforces the idea that capitalism has began to infiltrate Christian culture. In *UnChristian*, Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) discuss the perceptions that those outside of Christian culture have about Christians in the church today. The basic perceptions of Christians by people outside the church are that many Christians are hypocritical, inauthentic, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental (2007). This is far removed from what Jesus calls his followers to be in his gospels and teachings.

Overall these two books contain extensive research to reveal that not only many Christians do not understand what their practices should look like and where they come from, but that Christians are often seen as something completely different than "proclaimers of life" that they claim to be. One final book that is relevant to consider is *The Poor Will Be Glad*: *Joining the Revolution to Lift the World Out of Poverty* written by Christian leaders and business men Peter Greer and Phil Smith (2009). This book discusses how ordinary people can make major

changes in the lives of the poor through avenues such as micro financing and employment based

solutions. Micro financing and employment based solutions are new economic trends in

philanthropy that give small loans to those in lower socioeconomic and poverty areas of the

world to start their own businesses in the hopes that they will create a productive business that

will give back to their local economy and begin to hire and/or train others to do the same. As

these small businesses multiply and grow, the local economy will begin to be self sufficient as

the government and individuals are not tied to huge international loans, but rather small loans

that are forgiven if not paid back. What is interesting about this book is that it leads one to

believe that most of charity giving and activism on behalf of the poor is currently done outside of

the church organization rather than by it (Greer & Smith 2009). While a significant number of

texts generated within the Christian community discussing the chasm between the poor and the

wealthy, and its apparent perpetuation by church practices, there is a dearth of studies pursued in

academia regarding this topic.

Anthropological and Other Social Science Literature

Finding anthropological studies that discuss the pastors of the church has been hard to

come by while conducting this literature review. Anthropologists have not discussed the

predominant Christian culture in-depth, if at all, in theory. From a theoretical perspective,

anthropologist Edward Sapir (2001) and sociologist Emile Durkheim (1982) have discussed the

theory of "unconscious effects" that the culture and religion have at their base levels. In Edward

Sapir's *The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society* (2001) he alludes to the influence

that culture has on individuals without their conscious understanding of this impact. Sapir argues

that everyone is a product of one's culture at some level and we cannot be separated from that. He utilizes the mechanics of language and dialect to reiterate this thought in this reading. Emile Durkheim, on the other hand, examines how religion can be broken down into its most elementary form to understand all religions in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (2001). In this work's introduction, Durkheim argues that in order to understand the more complex religions, such as Christianity or Islam, one must understand the most basic forms of religion found in what he called "less developed" and more "primitive" populations (2001). This framework lumps all religions into one basic understanding, not giving much latitude for comprehending different belief structures and practices in different contexts. Nevertheless, these theoretical frameworks, laid out by Sapir and Durkheim, can help us lay a foundation for anthropological theory that we need to build on in understanding Christian culture and how it exists separately as well as along side popular American culture.

The arguably more relevant discussions of this topic in academia have been found outside of the field of anthropology. Many authors have focused on the power of religious entities and the regimes that they form, as sociologist Mart Bax writes in his book *Religious Regimes and State Formation: Toward a Research Perspective* (1987). Bax identifies the social and state power that religions use to influence societies, cultures, and state policies according to the ideals of the dominant religion in authority. While religion and politics seem to have little to do with each other at a superficial level, they are interwoven in complex and long-standing power plays throughout societies. He argues that the relationship between church and state can be best described as "antagonistic interdependencies," in that they rely on each other in their respective

power formations. While they work together in ways of impacting societies, religious regimes compete with the state and other belief systems to monopolize all spheres of life.

Several other authors (sociologists, religious studies scholars, psychologists, etc.) discuss the influence and power that religious regimes, and more specifically Christianity, the Catholic Church in many cases, exert in the forming of cultures and politics (Koster 1991, Meyer 2004, Schneider 1991). Adrianus Koster argues in *Clericals Versus Socialists: Toward the 1984 Malta School War*, that there was a political shift in Malta from the Catholic Church's control and influence on policy in the 1960s to the socialist government control from the 1960s to the present. He documents the fight over educational control and how the Catholic Church tried to retain power through private education, but the state ultimately stepped in and made the private schools free and accessible for the public, thereby removing some of the educational control sought by the Vatican (1991). In a different political context in *"Praise the Lord": Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere* (2004), Birgit Meyer discusses how Pentecostals have utilized mass media to infiltrate and take control of Ghanesic popular culture through the use of cinema and other media outlets. Pentecostals have leveraged the media to make their ideals and beliefs the cultural norms for the people in Ghana, even those that do not prescribe to Pentecostal beliefs. Meyer also refers to the connection in religion, culture, and business and how they are conflated together as they become more intertwined (2004). Finally, Jane Schneider in *Spirits and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1991) examines the battle of spirits as evil versus non-evil in Salvationist religions, specifically Christianity. She discusses how Christianity tried to eradicate the evil spirits of popular culture while alluding to the witch-hunts that personified this militant conforming of culture to Christian norms. She also equates the

beginning and rise of capitalism with the egalitarianism of brotherly love and forgiveness in Christianity. Here she asserts that the thought of complete forgiveness in Christ lead to Christians justifying the taking advantage of people and resources to get what they wanted because they were ultimately forgiven (1991).

Another important aspect of poverty of concern to the Christian church leaders and tackled in social science scholarship is liberation theology. Liberation theology discusses the social and political movement among the poor and the spiritual leaders that are trying to free them from poverty in South America (Bax 1987, Rieger 1998, Vásquez 1998). Liberation theology is defined as the spiritual interpretation of Jesus Christ's teachings through the eyes of the poor and the suffering. It has some roots in Marxist theory and was first revealed by a Peruvian priest named Gustavo Gutiérrez. His book *A Theology of Liberation* (1971) spurred on the movement in many other South American countries such as El Salvador and Uruguay. However, liberation theology studies focus mainly on poor individuals being liberated from poverty rather than church organizations, such as the Church in America, which consists mostly of people from the dominant middle class culture in terms of the leaders and the members of the congregations. Furthermore, those that aim to liberate the poor in South America do not hold to the same values as the church culture proposed for the present study.

Taken as a whole, these texts speak of the Catholic Church and Pentecostal influences, often political in nature, on European and African cultures. The American Church and popular American culture interdependencies are left under-examined in these works. While issues of religious political and social control and power are helpful in understanding the power dynamics

between the church, state, and local populations, they do not directly address the questions of prosperity and how wealth is conceptualized in Christian culture.

Likewise, critical studies about the subjectivities of those in lower socioeconomic class situations and the constraints imposed on the working poor has been well researched and discussed by anthropologists like Philippe Bourgois, Paul Farmer, and Donna Goldstein. However, most of these studies do not readily connect the influences of capitalism on the mainstream Christian culture, specifically in America. These texts are focused on the systems of capitalism and its perpetuation of structural violence. The concern with structure versus agency debates matters in the context of church culture because issues of poverty and marginalization are inherently of concern in Christianity and Christian churches, and therefore, could be expected in the discourses and teachings of the church leaders. In particular, questions of how the church should deal with poverty and severe class differences associated with capitalism and neoliberalism emerge: should the poor be given help directly? or instead be urged to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps"? or should the church focus on promoting larger, systemic and structural changes instead? A brief review of three prominent recent ethnographies that highlight the profound effects of structural constraints on the poor and the marginalized are useful to consider here.

Philippe Bourgois, in his ethnography *In Search of Research: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (1995), discusses how the system of capitalism coupled with persistent systemic racism has lasting effects on the young men that are crack dealers in Spanish Harlem in New York. While many of the people in El Barrio desire to "go straight" and work a legitimate job, they find it hard with the structural constraints, both economically and socially, that constantly weigh upon

them. As hard as they may try, it seems unlikely that they will ever escape the poverty that holds them in the ghettos of Spanish Harlem (Bourgois 1995). The lack of cultural capital imposed on the working poor is also an important aspect of this marginalization. Bourgois found that in El Barrio men even when they try to escape crack dealing by trying to work a legitimate job, they cannot hold the job long because they do not understand how to function in dominant capitalistic office culture. Because they cannot adjust to the social norms of American capitalistic society, they are spit right back to the streets of the ghetto where they continue to live in poverty, never learning to gain the necessary cultural capital that eludes them (Bourgois 1995).

Paul Farmer, researches and works with some of the Haitian poorest populations. He argues that structural violence manifested in severe poverty, lack of healthcare, and basic human rights perpetuated by the lack of political will for change, is imposed on the individuals in the lower socioeconomic class of Haiti. He describes this issue in his ethnography *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (2003). In this text Farmer discusses how capitalism and the drive for huge profits in medical and pharmaceutical sales hinders the people in Haiti from getting the proper medicine, nutrition, and care needed to fight such diseases as tuberculosis and AIDS. Farmer argues that the people of Haiti who need this medicine, because of lack of sanitary living conditions and nutrition, cannot obtain it because of the hindrances caused by capitalism (2003).

Another illustration of the detrimental and self-perpetuating effects of structure is seen in Donna Goldstein's ethnography *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (2003). Here Goldstein depicts how the working poor of Brazil have a daunting task of simply surviving day to day due to the structural violence that engulfs the people in the

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shantytowns of Brazil and prevents them from employment and educational opportunities that the middle classes enjoy. Struggle, violence, poverty, and death are so prevalent in this culture that all the people can do to deal with this life is to approach it with a dark and cynical humor about life—a coping mechanism of survival. The structural violence seen through the poverty that is imposed on these people is so great that they even have to laugh even at brutal violence and seem to have no other option to dealing with this struggle (Goldstein 2003).

The culture of poverty scholarship, highly controversial and debated, is relevant here in that it offers an opposing (to Farmer, Goldstein and Bourgois) perspective on the poor. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis in his ethnography *Five families; Mexican case studies in the culture of poverty,* discusses the culture of poverty and its effects on those that are raised in conditions of minimal economic abilities (1959). Lewis argues that the culture of poverty is something that is unconsciously learned, as Sapir may say, by children as it is passed down through the generations. A particular American perspective prevalent in the right-leaning discourses holds that it is poor people's fault that they are poor because of choices and personal downfalls that they have. However, Lewis proposed that even if people are brought up in a culture of poverty were to suddenly obtain wealth, they would still act as if they were poor as this culture is engrained in them as part of who they are (1959). Is it structural constraints that keep the poor in their poverty while those that are rich thrive and succeed? The focus of the culture of poverty perspective is concerning because it promotes the "blame the victim" justification to maintain the status quo. Instead the focus should shift to those that are wealthy and in the position of power in order to understand these dichotomies. Indeed, as Bourgois argues in his critique of the culture of poverty theory, Lewis overlooks the profound structural

and socioeconomic effects that lead to racial discrimination and class exploitation. While Lewis may have had an affinity for the socially marginalized, Bourgois argues that his ethnography is just another form of social constraints that reaffirms the "contempt for the 'unworthy' poor that permeates U.S. ideology" (1995:16).

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methods

Although quantitative and qualitative data exist involving Christian fundamentalism and the Word of Faith Movement, qualitative data in understanding subjectivities of pastors is lacking. Through this research I aim to address this shortcoming in scholarship by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with pastors in Orlando area. This research was designed around the *grounded theory* approach of interviewing (Strauss 1998). The *grounded theory* approach, which relies on continuous monitoring for saturation of themes during the interview process, necessitates that sample size be slightly modified in the event that saturation does not occur with the target sample, or if saturation occurs early and interviews become superfluous (Strauss 1998). Therefore, the crucial benchmark for success in qualitative, semi-structured interviews is to achieve narrative depth and saturation of themes. If necessary, the sample size is adjusted (enlarged or reduced) based on this benchmark. The grounded theory approach was used throughout the analysis of the narratives so that the researcher could maintain elasticity and honesty to allow unexpected areas of discussion to materialize. This will help by closely "grounding" the results in the detailed information of the narrative text (Strauss 1998).

Face to face in-depth interviews with key informants are appropriate in this study because they provide the detailed information from these pastors about their perceptions and behaviors in terms of culture the management of the church and the philosophy behind church related decision-making. Since they are leaders and experts in church culture and community, they are the best informants to illuminate the workings of church organizations. In-depth interviews also helped to adjust and direct my research appropriately as each interview brought up new

perspectives from the previous interviews (Glesne 1999, Wolcott 2008). Each interview took approximately 30-60 minutes. In some cases a follow up interview was scheduled. Interviews were conducted in a private room either in the pastor's personal office, or a location of their choice. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the informants, and detailed notes were taken during the interviews.

This research was approved by the University of Central Florida (UCF) Institutional Review Board on May 13, 2010 (Appendix A).

Interview Methods

For this research process, I prepared an Interview Guide (Appendix B) to aid in my questioning of the pastors. I asked questions that centered around how they understood economic emphasis of the Bible and the dominant America church culture based on their experiences as pastors. Interviews focused on the following topics:

- Life history questions,

- questions about church culture in general,

- economic trends and spiritual teachings in the church, and

- how their individual church organization was living out these teachings.

Research Setting

White male pastors that participated in this research were enlisted from the Greater Orlando area. The judgment to only recruit pastors from the Greater Orlando area was deemed appropriate because of limited time, financial constraints, and job responsibilities of the

researcher. These limitations did not permit recurrent and distant travel to areas outside of Orlando.

Recruitment and Inclusion Criteria

The requirements for pastors to participate in this study were that they had to be white, male pastors and worked for a predominantly white congregation or denomination. They had to be licensed or ordained pastors that lead church congregations in the Orlando area. Minority and women pastors were excluded in this study because the goal of the research was to understand the subjectivities of those in the dominant culture that traditionally have been dictating specific approaches to church expansion. While minority and female pastors are valuable in achieving a comprehensive collection of data for the entire church culture in America, their voices are often excluded in the dominant discourses and deserve a study of its own (discussion of future research direction follows in the concluding chapter).

The reasoning behind the exclusion of minority and women pastors comes from Laura Nader and her theoretical framework of "studying up" (1999). In her article *Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up*, she argues, "If we look at the literature based on field work in the United States, we find a relatively abundant literature on the poor, the ethnic groups, the disadvantaged; there is comparatively little field research on the middle class and very little firsthand work on the upper class" (Nader 1999:289). As the literature review shows, there are numerous writings on the influences of the church organization on the poor both in America and other impoverished and developing countries. On the other hand, finding anthropological literature based on fieldwork that aims at studying middle class pastors is rare.

These pastors are shaping the direction of much of the American church culture, yet their perspectives appear to be unstudied and invisible. Hugh Gusterson refers to this invisibility of the powerful when he states, "The cultural invisibility of the rich and powerful is as much a part of their privilege as their wealth and power, and a democratic anthropology should be working to reverse this invisibility" (1997:115). According to these anthropologists, those in the dominant, powerful, and rich sects of culture often times fade away into the background of academia and are rarely, if ever, studied. The concept of "studying up" encourages the process of using fieldwork research to understand those in power. White, middle class males, and in this case pastors, are all too often the group that wields economic and social power, and for this reason they must be studied thoroughly.

Recruitment Methods

Participants in this research were sought after by methods of *purposive* and *snowball sampling* as described by Russell Bernard in his book *Research Methods in Anthropology* (1994). He describes these sampling methods as fitting for a research model that aims to converse with individuals about sensitive topics.

In order to recruit the pastors I began calling and emailing pastors to schedule interviews at their convenience. I would explain to the pastors or their secretaries that I was a youth pastor from the area and a graduate cultural anthropology student at UCF. I provided information about the goals of the study as well as the time needed in order for the pastors to participate. It was explained that all information and identification would be kept confidential and that I would assign pseudonyms to protect their identities. After sharing this information either through email

or phone calls, interviews were scheduled with willing pastors. All emails and voicemails were destroyed after an interview time and location had been scheduled.

From these initial contacts with the pastors I then began to use the *snowball* or *networking sampling* technique by asking for referrals to other pastors they felt may be interested in the research project (Glesne 1999:35). Although I used the *snowball sampling* method, I focus on using *purposive sampling* in selecting the pastors of the church organization in order stratify the sample. *Purposive sampling* was important, as the aim was for the sample to consist of pastors from three different types of church bodies and organizations. I stratified the sample by selecting pastors that are: (1) church planting pastors, (2) established pastors, and (3) large and mega-church pastors. Individual pastors that have started a church fellowship and have less than 500 attendees at their weekly worship services are considered church planting pastors. Pastors that have started and/or been hired by a church and have been at an established church organization of between 500 and 2000 attendees at their weekly worship services are considered established pastors. Thirdly, pastors that are leaders of church organizations that have over 2000 weekly attendees at their worship services are considered mega-church pastors. These pastors are limited to white, middle to upper class males that lead an Evangelical church organization in the Orlando area. This sample is limited to this sub-sect of the Evangelical church culture in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of this specific realm of church culture. Because of lack of time, expanding this sample to minority and female pastors was unfeasible and would diminish thoroughly comprehending all of these sects as there are numerous culture differences in these groups, therefore the study would have been superficial in its examination of each.

These pastors serve as "key informants" for this study on church culture. Pastors that are key informants will provide valid and reliable data about the particular culture I will be studying. Russell Bernard describes key informants as "people who know a lot about their culture and are, for reasons of their own, willing to share all their knowledge with you" (2006:196). Pastors of church planting, established, and mega churches, will serve as ideal key informants with expertise and strong opinions in understanding and reconciling the issues at hand in the current American church culture. The key informant interviews will transcribed verbatim, then coded and analyzed so that the responses will be reviewed for consistent categories of topics and discussions (Bernard 2006).

<u>Sampling</u>

The textual data for this research project was obtained from interviews with 20 white, middle class male pastors of Evangelical churches in the Orlando area. According to established conventions regarding a wide range of qualitative methods, a sample of 25 participants should be sufficient to expose the full range of themes in the process of in-depth interviewing (Ulin 2005). However, I observed saturation of themes among the pastors and the interviews became redundant, so I reduced my sample size to 20 pastors as per the *grounded theory* approach and the saturation benchmark as mention above by Strauss (1998).

<u>Data Collection and Management</u>

All 20 of the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of each pastor. According to UCF IRB protocol, the 20 interviews were destroyed immediately after

transcription of the data. Eighteen of the 20 interviews with the pastors were conducted in their personal offices. Only two pastors asked to meet in another location, both in public, since their were pastors of smaller church organizations and did not have a building or personal office.

Consent to participate in the study only needed to be verbal, as decided by UCF IRB, since the pastors do not represent an at risk population, thus all pastors consented verbally. No personal identifiers about the pastors were collected or stored at any time throughout the process.

Each pastor that participated in the interview process, as well as any of my personal friends that I reference in this study, were assigned pseudonyms to protect the privacy of every individual. All transcriptions will remain password-protected and confidential. Once they are no longer needed each transcription will be destroyed based on the IRB policy.

All interviews were conducted and completed during the months of June and September 2010.

Data Analysis

To speed up the transcription process, all interviews were dictated using software called Macspeech Dictate. I then coded the transcriptions by distinguishing predominant themes throughout the interviews. After coding all the interviews each theme was classified as major, non-major, and I identified which themes began to develop shared ideas throughout a range of narratives.

All of the pastors that participated in this study were over the age of 30. Only a few pastors were over the age of 50 years old, so the majority of the participants were between the

ages of 30-50. This study did not aim to discuss generational differences between the pastors, so all of the pastors' interviews were included in this writing.

Data Limitations

This thesis study is not intended to be a comprehensive sample of the overall church culture of America. Much more time, effort, and finances would be needed in order to conduct a comprehensive sample of church culture throughout America. Therefore, the sample and data results are limited and cannot be considered representative since it is not a random national sample of all pastors in the United States. All of the pastors were white middle class males of predominantly white church congregations, therefore research results reflect only this particular group's perspectives. As a pastor myself, I was unable to attend the weekly worship services to hear the pastors preach in other Churches due to the overlapping time periods of services. Unable to attend and hear the pastors preach as well as observe the different atmospheres which each congregation create, limited some of my ability as a participant observer in this research study.

Outline of Chapters

In chapter one, I introduce eight of the pastors from this research study by giving a detailed description of my interactions with them at their interviews. Being able to know and interact with some of these pastors on a more personal level can help in understanding their spiritual subjectivities revealed in their narratives. I continue to present pastors' understandings of what it means to be a leader and pastor of a church organization from a Biblical and cultural

standpoint. The pastors' narratives in this chapter highlight the three roles they feel their position of leadership entails.

In chapter two, I focus on how pastors construct their definition of success within the church culture. Their definition of success can be broken up into two distinct but interrelated parts: 1) faithfulness to God and 2) numeric growth in members and souls saved. I examine how these two elements of the definition of success for pastors seem to strengthen, and yet, appear to contradict each other. The pastors' narratives reveal that although it may seem that faithfulness and growth can oppose each other, they feel that these two elements are mutually inclusive and often reinforcing when defining success in the church culture.

In chapter three, I discuss the major problems and challenges within the church culture and organization and how these issues seem to affect the effectiveness of the pastors as well as how the pastors cope with these complexities. I also examine the hegemonic influence of capitalistic ideals on church members and how the pastors are variously influenced by these constructs. Pastors' narratives in this chapter reveal the deeper spiritual subjectivities evident in ongoing discourse of what issues the church grapples with in today's culture.

CHAPTER THREE: GETTING TO KNOW THE PASTORS

Almost two years ago I started the journey of attempting to understand the church culture and organization from an anthropological standpoint. Being a pastor myself, and an aspiring anthropologist creates a tension in and of itself. I have the rare advantage of being familiar with much of the thought process of pastors and why they do, say, and emphasize what they do. While this is an advantage in my research it can also lead to ideas, assumptions, and biases about the pastors that may not be correct. However, not everyone has the ability to see the world from the eyes of a pastor and an anthropologist. That is why it is important to understand who these individuals are first before exploring the concepts that emerged from our discussions.

In this chapter I introduce some the pastors I interviewed and describe some of my initial interactions with them. Their experience in a specific setting of the mainstream church culture has shaped them in many ways into the leaders they are today, just as we have all been shaped by the cultures we grew up in. In order to understand the concepts the pastors discussed in their interviews it is useful to understand their backgrounds, where they came from as individuals, and what makes them the pastors and people they are today. I explore the different ways in which pastors understand their roles, what they feel their responsibilities are to the people they pastor and to Christ. Finally, I will analyze from an anthropological standpoint the ways in which personal backgrounds and cultures shape the pastors' perspective and the importance of this influence on the direction of the church organization and what is being taught to the masses by their spiritual leaders. By the end of this chapter, there will be a framework established of understanding these pastors on a deeper level, acknowledging their culture has shaped them, and recognizing that the culture that shaped them continues to shape the church culture today.

Pastor Jeremiah

I pulled into the parking lot of an old movie theatre, which has been converted into the church building of one of Orlando's fastest growing churches. As I walk into the building there are posters of upcoming events and teaching series where old movie posters used to be. Pastor Jeremiah's secretary meets me at the front door and walks me upstairs to his office. It was a large building with many of the gadgets that any pastor could want such as a high tech sound system, great digital media, and even a coffee stop inside. However, Pastor Jeremiah's office is very simply arranged with a desk, two sitting chairs, and a couple of bookshelves. He welcomes me and we sit down face to face in the sitting chair and began our conversation.

I can quickly see why so many of my friends have told me they love hearing Pastor Jeremiah teach and preach. He is a young, dynamic pastor that relates well with the younger generation, as he is of similar age. While he is dynamic, Pastor Jeremiah is also very unassuming in how he approaches people. Yet he conveys a sense of authority when he speaks, and this balance of humility and confidence is appealing. Pastor Jeremiah is a seasoned veteran for someone only in his mid-thirties. He has been in fulltime ministry his whole working career since the age of 21—a rare level of experience for pastors that age.

Pastor Jeremiah says that he has never wanted to do anything else other than being a church pastor. He joked that in the third grade he wanted to bi-vocationally work two jobs: lead a church and also be a Shamu trainer at Sea World at the same time. While training killer whales never materialized in his career path, being a successful pastor appears to come easy to him. Maybe the skills derive from his family pedigree, as his father is also a very successful pastor of a mega church. However, it appears that his desire to be a pastor is more than just following in

his father's footsteps, but is a true passion of his. I could easily tell that he loves what he does by the passion with which he described how he loves to teach about Christ and his frustration that anyone should not hear about or understand God's love.

Pastor Jeremiah's thoughtfulness was the most appealing part of our time together for me. After each question I asked he took time to think before answering. Over the years I have had many interactions with pastors where it seems as if they offer a pre-rehearsed dialogue for every situation, but this did not seem to be the case with Pastor Jeremiah. He took his time with each question and gave a heart-felt thought out answer before we moved onto the next topic. It was refreshing to see a man with a substantial authority choose his words so carefully and wisely.

Pastor David

Entering yet another single-family residence turned into office space was interesting. This house was one of several residential homes that had been converted to church offices. This office home was right in the middle of a wealthy area on the outskirts of Orange County. Instead of having skyscrapers towering over it, there were big willow trees creating peaceful shade throughout this part of town. The home office was very warm and homey, welcoming me in as I strolled through the kitchen escorted by Pastor David. We walked back to a small room with couches and chairs throughout and sat down to begin our conversation. While moving through the office I noticed it was a creative atmosphere with similar materials throughout. There was upbeat worship music playing in the background and large sheets of paper with drawings, diagrams, and slogans on them all over the walls and tables. This was not the typical office with desks and phones for everyday work, but rather it was a place created to facilitate creative

thought. I quickly understood, as I began to listen to Pastor David's story, that the man I was sitting in the room which facilitated many of the creative and artistic elements in this office.

At the age of 19 the leaders of Pastor David's church asked him to change his hair, clothes, and personality or leave the church because his hair was too long and they thought he was a little weird. Instead of cutting his hair he moved to Los Angeles to pursue his dream of working in theatre. His goal in life was to make it to Broadway one day as an actor. All of that changed in the late 1970s in his early 20s when, as Pastor David conveyed, God changed his heart and began to show him that he could use his creativity in the church. Instead of lording dress codes and rules over his congregation, as his church leaders did when he was a young man, he wanted to relate and interact on an intimate basis with the people in his fellowship.

Shortly after this realization Pastor David, together with his wife of six months, moved to Houston, Texas, where he began to apprentice under a church planter for the summer. Just a couple of weeks into his time in Houston he called his landlord back in Los Angeles and said that he and his wife were not coming back and they could have all their belongings in the apartment. For the first time Pastor David was involved with a community that saw people living out an authentic faith instead of just obeying religious rules, and it transformed everything in his life.

Seeing an authentic faith lived out by one man seems to be the reason why Pastor David approaches his way of leading his congregation the way he does. He says that he wants to help connect "the reality of God with the reality of life" for the people in his fellowship and those he comes in contact with. I could tell that his passion to see God become relevant in peoples' everyday lives was fostered by the pain that he felt as a young man when he was rejected by his church leaders for how he looked. Pastor David does not seem to want to change the

personalities of the people that he leads, but rather to bring who they are into contact with God in their everyday lives.

Pastor James

I sat in a booth in Panera Bread bakery eating a Cinnamon Crunch bagel and sipping on a Pepsi while I waited for Pastor James to grab his coffee after arriving a few minutes late. At first glance Pastor James is not the stereotypical picture that most people might have of a pastor. With his gel-spiked hair and goatee to his sweatshirt and jeans someone could easily confuse him for a construction worker instead of a pastor. A few minutes later Pastor James slid into the booth opposite me with his coffee, and we began our conversation.

The reason Pastor James arrived late was because he was held up waiting for someone to drop off materials at the homeless organization that he founded and runs. The sweatshirt and jeans he wears make a lot more sense when you realize that most of his days are spent with people that live in tent communities in the woods. It is hard to imagine that people are sleeping in tents as their homes while we sit in Panera Bread just two miles away from one of the homeless camps Pastor James frequents. In just a little over one year's time Pastor James has made a huge impact in the area for what he calls his "structurally challenged" friends. From sleeping arrangements during cold fronts, to laundry and shower areas for his friends to use, and even job and home placement programs, Pastor James is a man hard at work trying to care for an overlooked and often misunderstood population.

Pastor James has an outgoing personality that reminds one more of a funny, talkative uncle rather than a typical pastor. That is probably why it is so easy for him to relate to men and

women that are often times rejected by our society. He shows great passion when he speaks of his "structurally challenge" friends—an expression that captures the multiple levels of structural exclusion, including in the areas of employment, housing and healthcare, that the homeless suffer. However, just a little over eight years ago he was working as a salesman of expensive, custom made toilets with an annual salary of over $100,000. Pastor James told me the story of quitting his very lucrative job and deciding to go to seminary to pursue the profession of a pastor just a few short years ago---a challenging transition and even more so with a wife and children. Now instead of working to make hundreds of thousands of dollars he works for free, living off of the company buyout of his work contract, to help homeless men and women reestablish themselves into society and give them opportunities to better their situations.

This abrupt and drastic change in Pastor James' life and faith seems to be why he is passionate about teaching the Gospel to the people in his congregation and the homeless with whom he connects. His caring, fun, and lovable personality makes it easy to feel comfortable with him at all times. Although he is very caring, Pastor James is also extremely forthright and blunt. He will say what he thinks one needs to hear no matter what the circumstance and the consequences.

<u>Pastor Caleb</u>

Pastor Caleb is a warm and welcoming man. As soon as one meets him, Pastor Caleb conveys the sense that he cares about people deeply. We meet for our interview at his father's house, which is across the street from his home where he lives with his wife and five children. His father is a professor at a large seminary in the South and so he travels to and from this

seminary campus quite a bit. Pastor Caleb uses his father's dining room as his office. Working at his father's house gives him the chance to get away from his house if he needs to focus, but can rush home at a moments notice to help his wife with their kids. This is especially helpful for Pastor Caleb at this point in his life because he has just signed a contract with a Christian book publisher. He has already self-published book titled *LIVE SENT: you are a letter* in 2009, and is in the midst of rewriting it and preparing for three others in the next few years.

Pastor Caleb wears many hats. He joked that he does this because it keeps his baldhead from getting too cold. Along with leading a small church that he started almost seven years ago and being a published author, Pastor Caleb still has time to do many different things. He established and helps lead an organization that helps church planters throughout Florida and now other states meet together and encourage each other in their quest. He also established and leads a fellowship of several local churches that serve the needs of the community on a regular basis. In addition, Pastor Caleb is also on a task force for the Southern Baptist Convention[3] that meets to decide how the millions of dollars, which come in for outreach and service, should be spent. With all these different elements vying for his time, one might wonder how he has the time to accomplish all of this.

The most impressive part of Pastor Caleb is how much he has done and is doing at a young age. Only in his mid-30s, he seems to have established and accomplished more than many others do in their whole lifetime. But when I complemented him, his humbleness was authentic and gripping. He seems to not care if anyone hears or knows of his endeavors. Coming from a

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[3] The Southern Baptist Convention is the association of Southern Baptist Churches throughout the United States. This Convention consists of around 42,000 Baptist churches, consisting of nearly 16 million members throughout with 41 state conventions nationwide. This organization also financially supports over 10,000 national and international missionaries. See website: www.sbc.net.

lineage of the large Baptist Association set up through his father, he could easily leverage himself to be a major authority in the Baptist community. But instead of just following the traditional ways of doing things Pastor Caleb is challenging the norm.

Numerous times Pastor Caleb let his passion be known to me. He wants to change the way that the church organization lives, acts, and is seen by those outside of it. As I asked him what he meant by changing the way the Church lives, his response gripped me: "The church is not a building, organization, or thing" he said passionately, "but the Church is the people of God being a love letter to the world." He went on to explain that over 140 times the Bible says the word "church" and all of the original Greek language refers to the people of God, not a place. Pastor Caleb believes that if the people of God would start "being the church" instead of just "going to church" then the world would be different. As I walked away from our time together I began to wonder what it would look like for the people in the church to "be the church" as Pastor Caleb proposed. What if the people in the church culture were the church to the world, acting in real life rather than just making church part of their life? Would our world be different? Pastor Caleb appeared to believe in this direction deeply.

Pastor Andrew

There was an eerie sense of déjà vu as I walked up to the house to meet with Pastor Andrew. About three years ago I worked for a man that owned the old home I was about to enter. The last time I had been at this building I was crawling under the house in the crawl space to make sure the electrical wiring was connected. Luckily, this time I would not have spider webs and animal droppings all over my clothes when I was ready to leave. The déjà vu slipped away

suddenly when I walked into the house and saw that there were numerous people using this home as an office. All of the bedrooms on the bottom floor had been turned into offices or meeting rooms. There were post-it notes all over the conference room that I sat in preparing for my meeting with Pastor Andrew.

The reason that post-it notes covered the room's walls was because Pastor Andrew and his team had been having intensive planning meetings. Pastor Andrew and his cohorts are new to the area and have just been in the Orlando for only a few short months. Their church is a church plant sent from a successful mega church in another part of the country. Pastor Andrew and about two hundred other people moved to Orlando to plant a church with the support and financial backing of the mega church. So the notes represented planning for everything from volunteer roles that would be needed for the first weeks of their services, to community groups and leaders of those groups. Pastor Andrew and I had met a few weeks earlier at a community service event where we conversed and I told him about my research project. He said if he could be of any help then I could give him a call. After a couple of weeks, we finally had a chance to sit down. Pastor Andrew is very outgoing and talkative, and carried on a conversation with great ease. After getting a college scholarship for golf, Pastor Andrew decided to get a psychology degree from a state university in order to better understand how to work with people.

The reason I wanted to interview Pastor Andrew came from something that he had told me when we had met previously. He had related that the church that sent him here was especially interested in connecting with young, professional men that had no church background or had minimal contact with church culture normally. Their fellowship used relative, recognized, and mainstream popular cultural elements to connect with people, specifically men, that would never

set foot inside of a more traditional and standard church organization. Pastor Andrew stated that their target market was not to come and take members from existing churches but rather connect with people those churches normally pass judgment on or overlook. As we continued to converse during the interview, I realized that Pastor Andrew and his organization looked a lot different and had a unique focus compared to many other pastors that I know and had already interviewed.

It made sense to me that the mega-church that planted this church would have sent Pastor Andrew. Not only was he friendly and outgoing, but he also seemed to care for and have the ability to relate well with young professional men. At least he connected well with me and I do in fact fit into their target market aside from my church and pastoral background. Pastor Andrew explained that they wanted to do things differently than most churches and they wanted to connect with populations that most churches may deem unreachable with the Gospel and maybe even undesirable. As I left our meeting, I wondered whether this model of church planting was sustainable, given that it is particularly challenging to build a church organization made up of people that normally are critical of the church. However, I also understood that Pastor Andrew and his congregation were trying a somewhat new approach.

Pastor Isaiah

Three excited students ran past me as I enter the building for my next interview at 9am on a Tuesday morning. It was a weekday and since the church shared its space with a school, there were teenagers throughout the hallway. I was a little confused as to where to go but finally found my way to the church office building and met Pastor Isaiah's secretary. She led me into his office

and said that he would be with me in just a few minutes because his breakfast meeting had gone a little long.

Shortly after opening up my booklet to look over my questions one last time, I heard a big, booming, yet jovial voice greeting everyone in the main office. Pastor Isaiah's secretary informed him that I was waiting in his office and he entered the room. I was taken aback by the shear size of the man that entered. Pastor Isaiah had to be at least six and a half feet tall, with broad shoulders, long muscular arms, and hands that engulfed mine as we shook hands to greet. Along with his size and short sleeve golf shirt he looked more like a professional football player than a conventional suit and tie pastor. Though initially physically intimidating, Pastor Isaiah's warm and cordial personality immediately put me at ease after he introduced himself.

The two of us made small talk for the first few minutes of the interview and connected on some of the people we both knew within the church community. I told him that the family of my brother-in-law attended his fellowship. As we continued to talk I quickly realized why my brother-in-law's family enjoyed his teachings. Pastor Isaiah struck me as someone with whom you could sit and have a beer and watch a football game, as easily as you could have a theological conversation. He seemed to have the ability to connect with me on different levels and this made our time speed by as we continued the interview.

Three elements of our interview stood out. The first was the fact that he has been at his church the entire eighteen years of his profession in the ministry. He said that it was his current church that taught him Reform theology[4], that called him into the ministry, and this church was

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[4] Reformed theology roots come from the time of the Reformation and stem from the teaching of John Calvin. Reformed theology hold adheres to five point Calvinism of TULIP (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints.) See website: http://www.reformed.org.

where he wanted to retire as a pastor. For Pastor Isaiah, this church was his home and he did not seemingly want to move onto a bigger and/or better church. The second thing that left an impression was his willingness to give. When I told him about my desire to work with the poor, he offered to support a trip for me to Mexico City to work with an organization affiliated with their church. Also unusual were all the young people in his local church community. This made sense as Pastor Isaiah spent ten years in student ministry, where he led and ministered teenagers. Accordingly, much of our conversation was centered on teens. He told stories of the church affiliated school and how it had helped numerous area underprivileged teens. He wanted to change his local community by helping young people, especially those that did not have the same opportunities as their more affluent classmates. Pastor Isaiah spoke of how one day he would like to see a much more demographically representative student body. I walked away from my time with Pastor Isaiah feeling like there was a pastor that understood that opportunity for teens was a vital step in making a change in his local community and the disadvantaged near his fellowship.

Pastor Luke

Driving into a campus with which I was all too familiar, I had a sense of anticipation about my next appointment with Pastor Luke, who is the senior pastor of one of the largest churches in the Central Florida area. My familiarity with the campus had to do with the fact that for two years I coached boys' soccer at the high school affiliated with Pastor Luke's church. While I had spent many days and nights on the campus coaching soccer, I had never met Pastor Luke other than a cordial hello as we passed each other in the hallway. I had heard much about him as my wife's family attended his church and her two younger siblings were students at the

school. Thus, I looked forward to interviewing a man that provided my new extended family with spiritual leadership.

As the interview started, I mentioned my wife's family to connect with Pastor Luke at a more personal level. He was a welcoming figure that made direct eye contact and seemed to care about all of my questions and statements. He appeared to be a great listener, as he would process questions and focused intently on our discussion. When he addressed my inquiries he was gentle and softhearted. He told me stories of his recent travels in Haiti and Brazil and how they had changed him forever. Though Pastor Luke was gentle in his delivery, he held my attention as I listened to what he had to say. He appeared to be a true people-person with an easy-going demeanor. Seemingly energized by our conversation, my sense that he loved people was confirmed when Pastor Luke stated his favorite part of the job. With over 30 years in ministry, he has most enjoyed interacting with people. His focus and engagement during the interview mad me believe that connecting with people is what fuels him.

Unfortunately, our interview had to be cut short as he had to attend another business meeting. He asked me to accompany him to his next meeting so that we could have a few more minutes. As we wound our way through the back stairwells of this massive building, Pastor Luke encouraged me about my research. He said that he felt not enough people were asking the questions that I was pursuing, especially those related to tensions between the church and its wealth. He believed that in order for the church organization at large to make an impact in the future of my generation, the church leaders need to explore the answers to these hard questions.

Pastor Isaac

I was a little nervous about my interview with Pastor Isaac as I entered into his office. It was not because he was intimidating or a local icon of Orlando's Christian community, but because one of my best friends served as his student pastor. Pastor Isaac and I had exchanged pleasantries many times while passing each other, as I would meet my friend for lunch a couple times a month. I was worried that because I did not want to say or convey anything that may offend him and, thus, put undue strain on my friendship. However, I wanted to interview Pastor Isaac as their fellowship has been growing steadily over recent years and seemed quite active in the community from my outsider's perspective.

Before our meeting I knew two superficial things about Pastor Isaac. First, he was a pretty stylish dresser. He always had on nice jeans with hip and trendy graphic button down shirts. He might better fit in at a local nightclub rather than a church. And I think Pastor Isaac liked it that way. Second, I also knew that he was friendly and outgoing. He would always ask me how I was doing and make sure that he recognized me when I would come into the office to visit my friend.

What I did not know about Pastor Isaac was his extensive knowledge and background. Though he has been in fulltime ministry for decades, he did not originally intend to become a pastor. He initially wanted to pursue medicine as a way to serve the Lord. However, he realized that while working as a doctor might be lucrative, the time and effort needed to succeed in that field was not worth sacrificing. Pastor Isaac also knew quite a bit about the church organization from his 14 years as a pastor and most of that time has been spent working in and with mega-churches, making his perspective particularly valuable.

After hearing that he had such an extensive background in mega-churches, it was unsurprising that Pastor Isaac loves teaching and preaching to larger groups. He explained that he wants to passionately make his teachings relevant to everyday life and popular culture. He believes that churches, like all healthy things should grow. I enjoyed his honesty and apparent passion about growing his church numerically. It has been my experience that many pastors may say they are unconcerned about growth, yet direct all their effort toward expansion. Although numeric growth is a major focus for Isaac, it is hard to deny the passion with which he is leading and challenging his fellowship to grow in word, faith, and deed.

Challenging Pre-Conceived Notions

Because I am a pastor and possess an emic perspective about this walk of life, I understood that I had some preconceived notions going into the interview process despite attempting to assume an appropriate intellectual distance. Before this study, I had grown frustrated with what the wealth-building approaches promoted by some pastors and church organizations. These frustrations have grown from personal interactions with other pastors and trends that I have witnessed during my ten years as a pastor. Going into this project, I was ready to challenge and probe pastors' perspectives on issues of expanding their fellowships instead of cultivating the Gospel, as it truly should be according to the teachings of Christ. However, as I began to understand the pastors' own perspectives and experiences, my own critiques were also challenged.

What surprised me the most was that I enjoyed all the interviews even if I did not share some of the pastors' approaches. I felt as if they were genuine people and truly doing what they

thought God has "called" or "wired" them to do. I started the process from a skeptical position, yet I walked away with a different understanding of these men and why they believe and teach what they do in their congregations.

The Role of the Pastor

One of the first questions that I pursued with pastors was how they understood their role in the church organization. All 20 pastors had different ways of responding and emphasizing what they felt their roles were. Ultimately, three major themes emerged from this inquiry.

First, most of the pastors felt their role was to preach and teach the Word of God. Some pastors phrased this as being responsible to "equip the saints to do the work of the ministry." The phrase to "equip the saints" is understood to mean preparing believing Christian to carry out the work of Christ. This biblical idea comes from Ephesians, chapter four, and explicates what many pastors feel their role should be. These scriptures say: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (NASB Translation[5]). This scripture message, adopted by many of the pastors, conveys the importance of being a preacher-teacher as it emphasizes the task of leadership.

The second prominent role noted by interviewed pastors was to cast vision for the entire church body. As vision casters, pastors need to establish a direction that they feel the Lord has called them to and help guide other people in this manner. A major scripture informing this sentiment comes from Proverbs 29:18. It states, "Where there is no vision, the people are

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[5] NASB Translation stands for New American Standard Bible Translation. This translation is a newer and more accurate version as compared to the King James and New King James Version Translations.

unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law" (NASB Translation). As the scripture explains, without clear purpose or vision, believers will not know where to go or what to do. This idea of casting vision for congregation members is vital in order to get large groups engaged in a common goal. I will explore this idea in more detail in subsequent pages.

The third major role of pastors, involves leading and shepherding their people. The notion of leading the people in their congregation is one of service. By their lives, they are to exemplify what it looks like to follow Christ closely; thus, leading them according to God's will. The idea of shepherding, conversely, involves oversight and caring for the congregation members. Just as shepherds are to protect sheep and lead them to pastures to eat, pastors are to do the same for their flocks. This idea is exemplified in 1 Peter 5:1-3 which states, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (NASB Translation). This passage shows how the role of a pastor is one of service, shepherding followers of Christianity. It is a voluntary position focused on leading by an example of service rather than lording authority over individuals for selfish gain. According to this passage, oversight and authority in Christians lives is not just bestowed on individuals, but is rather earned by living a life according to God's will.

Preacher and Teacher

With my experience as a pastor, often times people think of a pastor simply as a biblical teacher. This is probably a good assumption because much of what is seen in the church organization is a dynamic and outgoing pastor teaching others about the Bible. Many pastors view themselves as more than just teachers from the pulpit. They feel they should be equipping the saints, who are defined as God's people, to do the work of the church in everyday life. One way to do this is to preach and teach from the pulpit and help the congregation understand the scriptures and how they can impact their lives. While preaching from up front is the most prominent way that the equipping of the saints is seen, it is not the only way.

Pastor Caleb describes his role of equipping the saints to do the work as giving Gatorade to his people. He states,

> The phrase that we use a lot is a Gatorade giver. I kind of get ticked off at the guys that act more like CEOs. Leadership is leadership. You can influence and give influence like an executive might, but I think in reality that the influence you give if you follow Christ's teachings is that you're enabling and encouraging other people. And any time that is attached to a purpose, it is healthy. So I think that helping people really learn what it means to follow Christ and then engage them and encourage them to live the things that come to their mind as they process it in their lives. That's the role of the pastor to equip them. (Interview with Pastor Caleb, July 2010)

In other words, Pastor Caleb wants to encourage other people to find what God has "wired" them to do and help them live that out. Instead of just telling them that they should do certain things or adhere to certain religious rules, he wants them to engage in their God-given talents. While a little bit older and saying it a little bit differently, Pastor Noah has the same understanding as Pastor Caleb. Noah is an interesting pastor to study. He grew up in the Midwest and his first church was a small country church. However, for the past decade prior to coming to his current

church, he worked as one of the pastors in one of Orlando's largest mega-churches. His years of experience and service in churches of various sizes gives him a seasoned perspective on this idea. He explains as follows,

> Ephesians 4:11 list the offices of the church, Ephesians 4:12 says what they're supposed to do, equip the saints. So my job is to equip them to do with them what God wants them to do. So that's a two-step process, help them figure out what God called them to do and then find out what resource or particular they need. A key thing to that is their spiritual gift. Once they discovered their spiritual gift then they know what is on their tool belts, then once they've got that, and I personally believe this is something I teach in my theology, then that is their evangelism tool and that's how they will evangelize. If the folks aren't being equipped and they are not doing ministry then I'm failing. It's not my job just to make them feel good and have a place for them to hang out and join the club, it's my job to get him beyond the distractions of this world and to start asking the question what is it that God created me to do. So that is my obligation to Christ, if I don't get that done and I've let the church down. (Interview with Pastor Noah, September 2010)

Pastor Noah believes that, in order to equip the saints, he has to help them understand their spiritual gifts. While his language is a little bit different than Pastor Caleb's, it is essentially the same conceptualization of the role of a pastor. The pastors want to help the people they are leading understand what God has for them individually. Most of the pastors that I interviewed seemingly wanted congregation members to connect with Christ and discover how they can live out their faith in everyday life. Instead of just teaching and telling people what to do, they want their teachings of the scriptures to help people hear individually from God how they can be part of His plan for the world.

This idea of equipping congregations to do the work of the saints informed all of my conversations with the interviewed pastors. Ultimately the pastors feel that they are failures if they are not helping people understand the purpose of why God created them and helping them live that out. Some of the pastors may seem more intent on doing this through their Sunday

sermons instead of connecting on a more personal basis. I tend to think a lot of this depends on

the congregation's size and not as much the personal preferences of the pastor himself. Pastor

Gabriel discusses what the different stages for pastors are when it comes to equipping members

of a church to do the work of the saints. Gabriel may be the best pastor to speak about this topic.

His congregation has only existed for a few years, yet it has quickly become one of Orlando's

more well-known congregations. Not only is church membership growing, but also it appears

that congregation members are actually living out their faith. Samuel spoke of how his role has

changed as his congregation has recently expanded from a church plant. He states:

> I think it just depends on where you're at and what your chores are. I enjoyed the
> networking and evangelism stage, while I've not done the church planning stage
> yet. But I enjoyed my docket just being filled with people, as I'm an introvert.
> Because all those meetings were one-on-one and they didn't drain me like group
> settings do. My job is becoming very group oriented, the platform, the speaker
> system, whatever, which is a very exhausting thing for me. So I sort of miss trying
> to share my faith with my barber. (Interview with Pastor Gabriel, July 2010)

Pastor Gabriel's narrative suggests that not everyone wants to teach and preach exclusively. It

reiterates the fact that pastors often just want to equip their fellowships to do the work of the

saints. In Gabriel's case, he would much rather meet one-on-one with people than speak up on

stage, as he says that large group atmospheres drain him. However, he seems to feel that for his

people to be sufficiently equipped to do the work of the saints, he needs to spend time

challenging them through scripture as he teaches. This may mean doing less of what he really

desires and using more of his time participating in what he feels is needed to serve his

congregation.

In the end, while preaching and teaching is a vital part of what the pastors felt their roles

are, it is done in order to equip the saints, or the members, to actually live out their faith

everyday. Of course the pastors are gifted in speaking, teaching, and preaching, but that gift is not necessarily the driving force behind what they do. Instead, it is a consequence of their desire to see the people in their congregation grow spiritually. While some pastors simply love teaching and preaching, others use it as a way to fulfill their calling to aid and equip their people to live out the Gospel everyday.

Casting Vision

When asked what the role of a pastor should be for his congregation, the second most common statement was that the pastor needed to cast vision for the congregation. Pastor John, the pastor of a large established church in a wealthy area of Orlando, explains that casting vision is a pastor's priority. He states, "First of all my obligation is to help people claim a vision and stay true to it" (Pastor John, June 2010). This idea of casting vision has a strong tie to leadership, especially in trying to accomplish a common goal as a congregation. It seems as if the words "vision" and "leadership" are often used interchangeably by these local pastors. The use of these two words is evident in the way Pastor Samuel describes his church role. Although Samuel's established church is situated in a less affluent area of Orlando, his congregation is rich in socioeconomic diversity. His congregation is comprised of individuals ranging from single, working African-American mothers to retired rich white men that have been in this area of Orlando for years. The congregation's diverse composition may be why he describes leadership and vision as follows:

> Number one, the pastor is to lead the people of God. He is to be an overseer, and so he is responsible for the spiritual leadership of that flock of people. That means he is to cast vision and set direction, he's going to set the disposition of that flock of people by his own example, and so he's got to discipline the people as well.

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That's all a part of the leadership. He's got to provide leadership for the people for them to become healthier, for them to prosper, to grow, to develop, to deepen in their walk with God. So, leadership. (Interview with Pastor Samuel, August 2010)

As Samuel explains, he is to lead his people to God. He further adds that this means he is to cast vision and set direction for his people. One could ask why the pastors are casting vision and to whom are they setting direction?

Pastor Benjamin, one of Orlando's and the Southeast's most well-known and respected pastors, and leader of one of the largest congregations in Orlando answers this question. With over 20 years of local pastoral experience and helping grow a significantly influential mega-church, Benjamin ostensibly knows how to lead people. He answers the question of what a pastor's role should be with a pointed statement on the direction of where vision is leading the congregation when he states, "The second one is to vision the future, to lead them where they need to go for their next step as a congregation in development as a disciple of Christ. Everything else can be done by lay people" (Interview with Pastor Benjamin, August 2010).

Pastor Benjamin's idea of casting vision is giving his people something to strive for in the future and to take the next step as a disciple of Christ. Casting vision evidently is helping people in the church set goals for where they want or need to be and helping them see the steps to get there. This means they need to grow step by step in their faith as individuals and as a church congregation. As they grow in their faith in one direction the vision for a congregation may change. Because the people in a congregation are continuously growing and changing the pastor constantly needs to vision cast for his people to move in the same direction.

This idea of vision casting further elaborated upon by a several other pastors. Pastors Andrew and Luke refer to casting a vision for their people and disseminating that vision into the church leadership. They explain this process in the following way,

> A lead pastor for me is…vision, called by God with a strong vision for where God is calling the church to go. It's leadership in that his job is to equip the saints and to release the saints to do the work of the church. So it's vision, it's leadership, and I believe it's teaching, bringing the truth of Scripture to a place where people can wrestle with it, internalize it, and live it out. It's not to do the work of the church, to be at everybody's bedside when they're sick. I really feel that my job is to pour into the staff as leaders, cast vision, and to teach God's Word. (Interview with Pastor Andrew, September 2010)

Pastor Luke reiterated the same understanding as follows:

> It is primarily casting vision and painting the big picture because at a church this size, leadership changes. Where you are constantly trying to pour into leaders and pour into those who will help carry that vision and implement it. Number one, a pastor's got to be able to communicate the vision from God's Word. (Interview with Pastor Luke, August 2010)

This idea of pouring the vision into the leaders or staff of the church is prevalent in many of the pastors' answers. It seems that most of the interviewed pastors understand that they cannot implement the steps of the vision that they are casting without support. Much of their time is spent investing in the leadership of the church, which works under their supervision, therefore the vision can be disseminated to the masses through numerous sources.

Though there is a strong emphasis on preaching, teaching, and casting vision, one pastor had a very different understanding of what his role should be. It interested me because he said many of the same things that the other pastors said, but in a very different way. As he explained his role as a pastor, Pastor David stated,

> We often say around here is that I can't make anyone grow spiritually, I can't make anyone fall in love with God, and it's very frustrating. I can't make anybody come to Christ and I can't make anybody give his or her money and I can't make

anybody do anything. All I can do is try to present the reality of God and create environments for God to work in. So sometimes I say I'm an environmentalist. I'm an environmentalist from the perspective that my job is to create environments for people to understand how God designed them and have the freedom to grow into that. (Interview with Pastor David, August 2010)

The concept of being an environmentalist, or someone that creates environments, intrigued me. Is that what the rest of the pastors meant by casting vision? Is setting up environments so that people can understand how God designed them really what casting vision is all about? Although the answers might not be clear, a prevalent theme in the role of a pastor is that casting vision is a critical aspect of their work. Maybe that is why some churches flourish and others perish. After all, so the church saying goes, where there is no vision, the people will perish.

Leading and Shepherding

The final theme that arose from the question of the role of the pastor reflected the need for the pastors to lead and shepherd their people. In other words, he is taking care of, or being a caretaker for, the congregation that he is put in charge of. Many of the pastors emphasized the importance of caring for their congregation. Pastor Jonathan, a jolly man with a boisterous laugh and soothing English accent, is a pastor of an established church on the west side of Orlando. His 400 member congregation informs his description of being a caretaker. His passions are to care for his congregation was evident in how he described what he felt the role of the pastor of a church should be. He says it well when he asserts that, "I think the role of the pastor as a caretaker, someone to take care of people. I don't think he's a CEO or a manager or I don't think he should be" (Pastor Jonathan, June 2010). Jonathan makes a distinction between caring for his people and being a proverbial CEO or manager of his people. In much of the church

organization, pastors have been placed in savvy businessmen roles rather than someone that

cares for the souls and spiritual direction of people. This was not the case for Pastor Peter, who is

the pastor of a mega-church in East Orlando. Although he leads a large congregation, one could

quickly tell that he was not an egomaniacal individual that just wanted to do everything himself.

Peter refers to pastors often being expected to do everything for a church when he says, "I think

more of the Western tradition, we sort of view the role of a pastor as he's the chief cook and

bottle washer and he does it all and we expect them to do it all" (Pastor Peter, September 2010).

He sees that in Western way of doing things we may have asked too much of one man in

a role of leader. Pastor Michael, who is the leader of one of the faster growing established

churches in the Orlando area and has planted numerous churches in the eight years of their

existence, agrees with Pastor Peter. Michael's understanding of this concept is important because

in order to plant numerous churches, a church organization has to have several leaders being

involved at every level of the church. He states:

> Our church is shepherded by elders who oversee our congregations and each
> congregation has congregational elders. We have major elders and congregational
> elders. So I think the church as a whole cannot be pastored by one guy, but it has
> to be shepherded by a plurality of elders. I think just biblically, and I know there
> is a lot of disagreement on that, but I feel like if Christ is functionally the senior
> pastor of the church it is necessary that there be a plurality of elders. Otherwise it
> becomes personality driven or program driven instead of Gospel driven. We have
> a pretty thought out philosophy on the whole deal but you do not have time to
> hear it all. But having Christ functionally be the head of the church I think there
> are some clear biblical mandates and implications regarding the local church.
> (Interview with Pastor Michael, September 2010)

Pastor Michael's idea of a plurality of elders takes away some of the glamour of being a head

pastor. In many American churches, the notion of numerous people working together to lead

others spiritually may be more accurate to what should be the case for a pastor than one pastor

caring for hundreds or thousands of people.

In response to what Pastor Peter and Pastor Michael emphasize and what the other

pastors have said about the pastor's role, this "do-it-all" type of person is not truly what a pastor

should be. It seems that the pastors feel that they should dwell in their strengths and spend most

of their time doing what God has "gifted" them to do best. Others have a strong opinion on how

the pastors should lead and shepherd his people. Pastor James, who has planted a church and

runs a homeless organization, states that,

> I think it has a whole lot less to do with preaching. There are guys that can preach circles around me. My favorite verse in the Bible is James 1:22, "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says." And to me that just covered everything. I wear this bracelet and I probably have given away 1000 and it says watch me live my life and that's for no one else but me. I can say anything but what am I doing. How scabby are my knees and how dirty are my hands. So I really believe that the role of a pastor is you've got to be the cheerleader and you have to be the one willing to go in first. People will follow but you have to encourage them throughout the process. (Interview with Pastor James, August 2010)

Pastor James was one of the few pastors who argued that showing the people how to live out

their faith is crucial to effectively shepherding them. Many of the other pastors might say that the

most important thing that a pastor could do is teach, preach, or cast vision. Pastor James

conveyed that working alongside his people is the most vital element of his job as a pastor and

the best way to teach and cast vision for them.

While there are three different roles of a pastor, they seem to all be organized around the

same agenda. That agenda is to help people understand what God wants of them and to live that

out on a daily and devoted basis. So whether a pastor feels that teaching and preaching, or vision

casting, or leading and shepherding is the best method, they all seem to agree that the goal is the

same: complete commitment to Christ and doing what He says in their lives. Pastor Jeremiah

sums up very well what the role of a pastor should be when he said,

> I think some of it depends on the way that God wired a particular minister up. I think there are some things you cannot let yourself off the hook for no matter what your particular gift makes is. I think the pastor ought to be ultimately responsible for whether or not the community that gets created, or that God pulls together, really is trying to reach people that are far from God. I think the pastor ought to be ultimately responsible for setting up systems where people can form and better Christ centered relationships. I think the pastor ultimately is responsible, and there's different language for this, for making sure the truth is both taught from propositional standpoint, pointed to from incarnational standpoint, and lived out to some extent within the actual community. I think that every pastor is responsible to see that community actually does good for those outside the four walls of the particular congregation and serves and actually takes seriously the charge to be the hands and feet of Christ in the body of Christ. I think the pastor is responsible to make sure that the congregation sees those acts as acts of worship to God. (Interview with Pastor Jeremiah, July 2010)

Similarly to other pastors, he argues that no matter what the vehicle used by a pastor to connect

best with his people, ultimately the goal is to worship God in all that they do. The tools of how a

pastor gets his people to worship God may be different, but they are all trying to build "different

parts of the same building," which is God's kingdom. The tools used in finishing the job do not

seem to matter to the pastors, just that the project is completed.

To Whom Are You Responsible?

As I explored the question of pastors' responsibilities to the people in their congregations

and to Christ in these interviews, ultimately pastors think that their responsibility to their

congregations and Christ himself is complete devotion to living a life pleasing to God. Almost

every pastor, in one way or another, asserted that if they are not completely devoted to Christ,

then they cannot begin to lead their people either. It was refreshing to hear from all of the pastors

that their main goal was to live out their faith first, and then ask the people that they lead to follow them in that path. Pastor Peter may have said it best when he explained,

> You know, if I don't live His principles, then what good is my role in the local church? So I believe that I have to be a fully functioning follower of Christ; I have to be a true disciple. I have to know what he wants and model that in my life. What I've always said about my father is my father never preached a message he didn't live, and he never lived a message he never preached. So I believe that is the role of the pastor to make sure that our lives are modeling what we preach and teach. And that we are doing it so that we can say as Paul said, follow me as I follow Christ. (Interview with Pastor Peter, September 2010)

As Pastor Peter says so well in this statement, if he as a pastor is not trying to live the life that he preaches, then how can he ask someone to follow him? If these pastors are not trying to find their vision and direction from Christ, then they will lead their people astray. They are ultimately responsible for where they are leading their congregations. If they do not live by the principles they teach, they will be unable to show people that follow them how to live out the principles of their faith. Also, if they are not being cared for in their spiritual life by the one they say they worship, who is Christ, then they cannot care for the spiritual needs of others. In the end, this may be the most important statement made by the pastors. What the assertion by Pastor Peter and similar declarations made by other pastors show is their ultimate responsibility to believe and live their faith first. Once they live their faith, then they can lead other people in the way of understanding what God wants for them.

Discussion: Knowing the Stories

This chapter is crucial in setting up the framework for the rest of this study: understanding the pastors' cultural backgrounds and what they believe are important in leading their people. Their local cultures have influenced their individual preferences when leading a

congregation, yet as numerous pastors said, they want to be involved and feel more comfortable in big churches. They explained this preference relates to their past experience larger churches. Other pastors who teach and lead in more intimate and personalized ways were brought up in smaller churches most of their lives.

Linguistic anthropologist Edwin Sapir speaks of this conditioning and patterning of one's understanding of culture in his article, *The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society* (2001). In his work Sapir uses language analysis to show how a culture naturally influences an individual without his or her awareness. Just like a child learns a language without ever intentionally trying, the same can be said for local cultural patterns that depend on the language, concepts, and stories derived from the Scriptures. The process of grooming young pastors into a particular denomination is often an unconscious patterning. It is not surprising that a pastor, whose father has been a mega-church pastor for over 30 years, has a tendency to follow the same footsteps, adopting the discourse, the goals, and the vision associated with the mega-church setting. The same can be said for the pastors that have different stories and different interactions within their respective church cultures and organizations. Someone that has been groomed by pastors in smaller churches is likely going to have an inclination to smaller, more intimate fellowships.

Sapir also speaks of a reciprocal dynamic in which an individual affects the pattern of culture by his or her individual preferences, choices, and influence. He proposes that, "We will assume that any kind of psychology that explains the behavior of the individual also explains the behavior of society in so far as the psychological point of view is applicable to and sufficient for the study of social behavior" (Sapir 2001:181). While single personality types cannot be assigned

to the wider culture and society, the deeper concept of the profound influence of pastors on the local culture of their congregations is, nevertheless, meaningful in the context of the church culture. In essence, the culture that has influenced a specific pastor to socially form him is continuing to impact current forms of social behavior in the church. This influence the pastors have may be even more prevalent since they are seen as authorities and leaders. Therefore, pastors wield significant power and influence within their congregations. This understanding is crucial because what the pastors feel, think, and believe is going to have important implications on the social behavior that is recreated and seen in the church culture and organization. One can not take the individual pastors out of their current positions and settings without expecting their congregations to be affected. Having a different pastor with varying social experiences would presumably change that congregation's social behavior and attitudes. In this sense, the church cultures are rather heterogeneous, which makes it particularly important to understand where these pastors came from and what they feel they should be communicating to their people about the ideology of their faith. The following chapter will explore pastors' conceptualization of "success" in their congregations.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONSTRUCTING THE PASTORAL DEFINITION OF SUCCESS OF THE CHURCH

In many of the interviews I conducted with the pastors, two predominant themes arose regarding the definition of pastoral and church success. In the previous chapter, the interviewees suggested that their primary roles related to preaching, and teaching, cast visioning, and leading and shepherding their congregations. This chapter intends to show how these defined roles help with the construction of success ideas of pastoral and the direction of his congregation. The interview narratives demonstrate that the dominant idea of success is equated to being spiritually faithful to what God has individually "called" them to do. In turn, numerical church growth is viewed as a good sign for many of the pastors that they are being faithful, and thus successful. It became obvious that the ideas of faithfulness and success could not be separated in the minds of these pastors. There seems to be an ever-present tension in defining the success of a church based on these ideas of faithfulness and numeric growth.

I was first confronted with this tension a little over five years ago, when I was working as a student pastor in Orlando for a year. At the time, I decided to pursue seminary as a way to further my Biblical knowledge and understanding in order to be a better pastor for my students. In one of my courses I was asked to read two case studies and write papers based on the material. The case studies, written by the president of the seminary, were titled: "How to Double Your Attendance in One Year" and "How to Double Your Tithe in One Year." I had gone into the seminary with the goal of learning how to better minister, but was instead presented with a financial growth strategy. My own idea of success clearly did not conform with the received wisdom of this mainstream church seminary. I had to move beyond the church's sub-cultural

conventions of spiritual success to define the idea of success for myself. It is that process that I wanted to focus on with these pastors.

In what follows, each pastor present their personal definition of what success for themselves, church members, and their entire congregations. I will demonstrate specifically how they construct their definition of faithfulness and how that construct is used in their personal lives and as church leaders. I will also discuss the ideas of numeric church growth and how this metric of measuring success relates to the shadow of faithfulness to spiritual calling as well. These themes of faithfulness and growth seem to be the dominant notions for measuring success in the minds of the pastors.

Defining Faithfulness to God

In order to understand how the pastors in my study define success for themselves and their congregations, we must first understand the concept of faithfulness to God as shown in the *New Testament*. There are many different permutations of faithfulness in the *New Testament*, but the most applicable notion is best illustrated in one of the "first-hand" teachings of Christ's from the book of *Matthew* the Bible. *Matthew* chapter 25 portrays Christ's own understanding of faithfulness to God.

> For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have

been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, "Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
(*Matthew* 25:14-30, *ESV Translation*[6])

In this story Christ makes a distinction between the faithful servants, who took the talents that their Master had given them and used them to benefit and grow the kingdom, and the unfaithful servant, who lazily buried his talent, that was cast out because of his failure to invest the talents wisely. According to this parable, faithfulness is working diligently and not wasting the talents that have been bestowed upon a person. Thus, it is an explicitly agentive model of faithfulness in which both God and the individual agency work together.

This is the framework in which we should understand the idea of faithfulness when the pastors equate it to success. As I will demonstrate below, each pastor wants to be known as the "good and faithful servant" rather than the "wicked and slothful servant" as seen in this passage. They want to use the talents given to them to be faithful in order that they may succeed in doing what God has gifted them to do. For the pastors, anything less than using the talents given to them for the glory of God would be unfaithfulness, thus failure.

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[6] The ESV Translations is a contemporary translation that reads more literally than the New International Version and is much more idiomatic than the New American Standard Bible Translation.

Success Measured by Faithfulness of a Pastor to God

Based on the understanding that these pastors construct their ideals of success from such biblical parables and maxims, I will show specifically how these pastors measure their ministry's success through their faithfulness to God. As was stated above, being a faithful servant is a desire that all the pastors alluded to throughout this study. A pastor cannot truly be successful if he does not believe that he is faithful to God, and continually attempting to do what he feels God wants him to do with his congregation. Without this ongoing faithfulness to God, he cannot be successful. Here, Pastor Isaiah explains how he understands success:

> I would say faithfulness in a word. Faithfulness to God's word, faithfulness to try to shepherd God's people, and that's not a very sexy way of defining success but it really is if I really truly believe it. You look at the prophets of the Old Testament, according to Western eyes if you look at Jeremiah, who is the weeping prophet, he didn't have a whole lot of success in converts. When you talk to a Presbyterian Church of America minister, conservative and reformed, we are to believe that God is sovereign over creation and reached creation and that we can't change the heart as people. If we really believe that our success isn't in how many converts we see or how big our budget is, I think it's faithfulness. In a typical American Christian mind it would be that the church is growing, it has multiple programs, it's big. And I think you have to fight that mentality. I think that at the end of the day you just realize that it's those that are faithfully listening to God's word and loving God's people that are successful. (Interview with Pastor Isaiah, September 2010)

Essentially, Isaiah explains that success is embodied in being faithful to God, not trying to grow one's church organization to be large.[7] In fact, he would argue, according to his Reformed theology, that he has no control over growing his church organization—growth would be completely in God's hands. However, for Isaiah his definition rests in his commitment to Christ

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[7] Pastors' perspectives on the issue of numerical growth of their congregations will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

alone. Faithfulness, and thus success, is to be listening to God's word and loving other people,

not growing an organization in size but instead growing it in the spiritual intensity.

Following up Pastor Isaiah's ideas of being faithful as a pastoral measure of success,

Pastor Jeremiah goes one step further. He states that along with being faithful, a pastor has to be

obedient as a leader in following God as a leader of a congregation.

> To me everybody has the same responsibility to be faithful and God can do a lot
> with a little or little with a lot. And I'm not sure how much, as Wesleyan and as I
> am, the responsibility for results falls on the shoulders of the people. I think that
> God calls for faithfulness and obedience and then he takes our meager best,
> whatever it is. It's not like an organization of 100,000 has a whole lot more to
> offer to God that an organization of ten. And if you look at it as just a scale of
> finite versus infinite is really no comparison. So the question is what is God wants
> to do with it. But I think the answer is yes regardless of the size of the
> organization that God can and will do great things through men, he's God. But to
> whom much is given much is required, so there's that other part. (Interview with
> Pastor Jeremiah, July 2010)

At the end of his statement, Jeremiah explains a spiritual reciprocity: from those pastors that

have been given much, much is required. This is a clear reference back to the concept of the

good and faithful servant from *Matthew* 25. The servant that was given ten talents was held to a

higher standard than the other two servants in that he had more resources and more in return was

required from him. Being faithful and obedient to use the talents, gifts, and resources that one

has been given is paramount in being successful as a pastor. According to Jeremiah, pastors who

have more resources are held to a higher standard of obedience to use those resources and talents

to the best of their abilities in order to remain faithful to what God. However, this obedience is

far from passive; instead it is highly empowering in that it motivates agency in church pastors

and members to take personal action rather than adhering to submissive and blind obedience.

Finally, a pastor must be faithful to the mission that God has given him, and, thus, must lead his congregation in that mission to be successful. As Pastor Isaiah said above, a pastor must listen to the voice of God faithfully. By doing so, they will hear the mission that God has given them. Knowing what that mission entails is essential if the pastor is to faithfully carry out God's mission. Pastor Matthew's perspective on the topic of being faithful to a mission is extremely valuable. He is the pastor of a mega-church in downtown Orlando. The church he leads was established in Orlando in 1879 and has had a presence in the heart of the city for the last 200 plus year. This successful church could not have survived for so long without a clear mission and faithfully adhering to that mission. Matthew explicates this concept as follows:

> I think a successful church organization to me is one that, for lack of a better word is one that keeps their eye on the ball, which is they have a razor-sharp focus onto the unique mission that God has called them to fulfill in the community in which they find themselves. For our church we define success as being true to our mission to glorify God and what we do through building a diverse body of confessing believers who want to see God in worship, share him evangelistically, and serve missionally. (Interview with Pastor Matthew, June 2010)

For Pastor Matthew, success is defined as staying "true" or faithful to the mission God has prepared for him. If he were to veer away from this mission, then he would be unsuccessful in fulfilling what God has for him and how He wants his congregation to grow. This "razor-sharp focus" of the "unique mission" that Matthew speaks of seems to mean that by being faithful to God in his personal life he will lead others the way he is following God.

The consensus appears to be that if the pastor is not himself faithful to God, there is little chance that he can rightly lead his congregation on a mission for God. Pastor Jonathan has an interesting interpretation on this faithfulness when he says,

> I define it as hearing and doing. I think that you know that in the Hebrew he can't separate the word hear from doing, if you don't do then you didn't hear it. I think

that success is hearing him and doing it. I think sometimes we make it more complicated than that, I think that's discipleship, just following him by hearing and doing. (Interview with Pastor Jonathan, June 2010)

Personal faithfulness and pastoral success are inextricably linked and cannot be separated. The more faithful a pastor is to hearing and doing what God has "called" him to do, the more successful he will be. This may not come in the form of organizational church growth, but in spiritual growth and satisfaction. Success, then, is completely encompassed in the ability of the pastor to remain faithful to God the entirety of his life and career as a pastor. Like the parable of talents that Christ describes in *Matthew* 25, the pastors want to be faithful so they can hear at the end of their life from Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Personal Faithfulness of the Congregates as a Symbol of Success

In addition to relating success to faithfulness to God's mission, many of the pastors also conceptualize success with how faithful to God their congregates are in their lives. If the pastors are being faithful to God, yet their congregation is not, then they cannot define that as a successful church organization. The pastors want to see their congregates living out their spiritual faith by making it the main part of their lives, rather, than just something they do as religious practice. Pastor John sums up this idea when he says,

I think that the way we are defining success is, how many people are becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ? And if you are a mature disciple of Jesus Christ, Jesus doesn't say okay mature disciple means you're good to be sitting in worship every Sunday and experiencing the joy of the fellowship and then you're just going to go live your life the rest of the week. A mature disciple is sent to do something. Everybody who will do it, because we can twist their arms, does the spiritual gift inventory here and once we know what their spiritual gifts are they get a mentor who looks at their talents, their passion, and their spiritual gift, and

we direct people to their place of service that is appropriate for how God has wired them up. (Interview with Pastor John, 2010)

This concept of finding the congregates' spiritual gift is intrinsic to helping the individuals members to be faithful to how God has "wired them," as Pastor John states. Pastors do not just want to get up and preach on Sundays, put on a good show for their attendees, and let them go home satisfied with their weekly attendance. Rather, pastors in this study want their congregates to move from simply attending church services and hearing about God to living genuinely faithful lives. They want their congregates to listen and obey God in their own personal lives. Pastors argued that without the individuals in the congregation making steps toward this end, they themselves and their members cannot be successfully faithful. Pastor Peter reiterates this claim by saying:

> To me success is when people know who they are and what God expects of them and then they began to practice that has a body. That the church loses the spectator mentality and understands that shepherds don't bare sheep, but sheep give birth to sheep, shepherds care for sheep. So if the shepherd is caring for the sheep and the sheep understand the role in the church I believe will grow. Anything that is healthy and viable will bear and offspring, it happens in the animal life and the plant life and it happens in humanity. And I believe that if we can get that concept back into the local church that the local church will once again began to be what Jesus intended for it to be. (Interview with Pastor Peter, September 2010)

As church members begin to shift from simply being spectators on Sunday mornings to being participants in the faith, the pastors take this as an affirmation of the success of a church. Here Pastor Peter refers to the fact that a shepherd, or pastor, cannot birth new lambs, but a sheep must do that. He is referring to the individuals in his church body making disciples, or helping convert and grow individuals outside of the church into believers. For Peter, this is when a pastor

knows that his church is being successful. As he states, as his congregation understands this

concept more, the more that his church will grow. As Pastor Luke reiterates when he says,

> The win for me, the goal, is number one, changed lives. Lives that have been set free by the gospel of Grace and two, lives that are growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ, and number three, lives that are reproducing. We have been very good at the first generation, the first two of those. We've been fairly good and fairly effective at lives being changed. This church baptized about 970 something last year, and this year will be in about the 600s. And we've seen a significant number of them beginning to grow. But it's that second generation that I'm concerned about. Are those people reproducing? Is the growth happening here one generation or is it second generation? I just feel that to measure a church you've got to have all three, the life change, growth in the likeness of Jesus, and the reproducing. Churches have different markers, evaluate by the different markers that you've identified, and then are they reproducing? (Interview with Pastor Luke, September 2010)

It seems that these pastors strive not to make spectacles of themselves that encourage

passives listening from their congregates, but, rather, to encourage people to live out their faith

and be ministers themselves. They see their congregations as being faithful when they follow

God's mission for them to love others. When they are faithful this way, they help to change the

lives and hearts of individuals. In doing so, they also help build up the church with more

individuals living out their faith as well. Therefore, the essence of success for many interviewed

pastors is that the people in their fellowships not only believe the teachings of the scriptures, but

that they are helping other people believe and adhere to them as well.

Pastor Caleb goes one step further than the rest of the pastors by tearing down the

denominational and congregational boundaries of church organizations and thinks about the

church in terms of the city. He does not seem to care if of his congregation bring more converts

to his church, but just help them to experience God no matter what church fellowship they decide

to join. He says,

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For our fellowship, what I keep looking for and hoping for is that everybody that says they follow Jesus, and connects with our little expression of the church lives sent. By the way I think the church in the New Testament is not typically thought of on any less of a level than the city. And so in that city there might be multiple expressions of the church alive and evidenced, but it's really about the kingdom coming alive in that city. And so for us to want to see that happen here, I want to see us be a small part of what us altogether as the church can be to the city. Like I said a while ago, what would be successful to me if we truly saw people who were in deep need become givers to others indeed need, and to make that a cycle that continues. But the other success for me is that people, whether they exist as a CFO of the company or their teacher or their garbage collector, would see their everyday life is a chance to give their life away into someone else's life. To live sent as we say, to me that success is it on that level. (Interview with Pastor Caleb, July 2010)

For Caleb, success is seeing all of Orlando's churches come to life and live in faithfulness to God. His idea of success seemingly entails Orlando's churches demonstrating God's glory. If this idea of being faithful to God means loving people and listening to God, then that may change peoples lives, but it does not always mean that a faithful church organization will necessarily experience numeric growth. However, according to Caleb, the growth of his church fellowship seems to matter much less to him than faithfully cultivating God's love in peoples' lives and seeing that lived out on a city wide basis.

Faithfulness Does Not Always Equal Organizational Church Growth

My father was a pastor for 15 years of a little country church of about 30 members in the Mulberry valley of the Appalachian Mountains in rural East Tennessee. Although he had a business of his own, and we lived over an hour away from the church, he served the people of that congregation faithfully. During the 15 years that my father was at that church, I do not remember him adding any members to his congregation. In fact, the number of attendees may have decreased as several of the older members passed away in their old age.

If my father's church were to be measured by typical American church growth standards, it could be considered a failure. But if we look at his pastoral tenure, in light of the faithful definitions held by the interviewed pastors, my father was successful. While church membership may not have grown, the people were challenged by my father in the scriptures every week. In fact, adding members would have been difficult, as most of the area was surrounded by family farmlands and the majority of the families that lived within a 10-mile radius. Both his church and the local Baptist church were attended by multiple generations of the families from the surrounding areas. The familial tradition of the farmers did not allow for attending any other church apart from the one that their parents and grandparents attended. This limitation on possible growth begs the question, "*Would pastors see my father's church as successful?*" Pastor Jacob, who leads an established church of about 1,500 members in one of the wealthiest areas of all of Orlando and Florida, appears to answer this question inadvertently when he says,

> A successful church is the one that is being obedient to what God has told them to do in their cultural setting and in their time. It may be a church of 80 it may be a church of 8,000, but success is not determined by the number of people that show up but is determined by obedience. I think God has placed certain bodies in certain places at certain times to accomplish certain things in his sovereign will and the question is, are we being obedient to that following of the Holy Spirit's leading. (Interview with Pastor Jacob, June 2010)

According to Jacob's definition, both my father and his congregation were very successful. My father felt that he was being obedient by serving and teaching the 30 or so members of his congregation for all those years. I asked him one day when I was a teenager why he continued to pastor that church and he looked at me and said, "God told me to be there. Who else will shepherd them if I won't." That statement stuck with me all of these years and reiterates Jacob's explanation of obedience. My father was only obeying what he felt that God was asking

him to do, and if that meant to stay and preach at a church of 30 rural farmers, then that was what he was going to do.

If nothing else, my father's experience with the "little country church" should invoke the idea that not every pastor or church that is faithful will see numeric growth. Merely increasing in numbers, discussed below, does not define the success of a church. If the definition of success for a church or pastor remains being faithful to God, then many times some of the most successful churches in the world never expand in numbers. One of the most famous example of this notion is Mother Teresa, one the most well known icons of the church herself. During her time working in Calcutta, Mother Teresa spent the majority of the time in her life cleaning the wounds of the dying lepers found in the streets of her city. It is unlikely that many people would say that Mother Teresa was not successful or faithful at fulfilling her calling or being affective in showing the love of God those that seemed hard to love, even if her church never grew.

In general then, the words '*faithfulness*' and '*success*' seem to be interchangeable in the minds of the interviewed pastors. Being faithful may lead to church membership growth of a church, but this is not always the case for every fellowship and not the primary goal but rather a byproduct of faithfulness. From the typical American capitalist point-of-view, success must equal growth and gain. However, this concept of growth and gain cannot always be congruent with Christian faith and service, especially if there is not a clear definition of what constitutes a successful faith. Pastor James addresses such complexities perhaps the complexity of being successful for God better than other interviewees:

> If you want to use the word successful, which makes me leery, because I've seen
> fellowships of 20 or 30 people that are the most successful ministries I've ever
> seen because there is life change. And so if you take that small fellowship and are
> they an instrument for change, true change not for the sake of change but true

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change in the lives of people where you see fruit. Where suddenly people are
living out their faith. (Interview with Pastor James, August 2010)

As James suggests, numbers do not necessarily equate to effectiveness in terms of living out a

faith for a congregation. A small church fellowship can theoretically be just as, faithful as those

of a large church. Though faithfulness is hard to quantitatively measure, it is, scripturally

speaking, the standard for measuring whether or not a congregation and its pastor are successful

in the eyes of God. And according to the pastors and the story Christ told of the "good and

faithful servants," being successful in God's eyes is all that really matters.

Success Defined by Numeric Growth of the Congregation

While the majority of pastors believed that numerical growth is unrelated to

congregational success, others argued that a successful church relates to the active membership

growth. While this may seem like an undue focus on organization building, this growth actually

functions at a deeper level amongst this subset of pastors. When they are speaking of numbers, it

is not just Sunday morning service attendants, it is also the number of people to living out their

faith everyday with the help of the church. Although ideal of faithful members is often times

hard to quantify, according to these pastors, this type of faithfulness is the goal for the pastor and

his church.

Numerical size has been a focus of the Christian church from the First Century onward.

In the second chapter of *Acts*, after Christ's resurrection, his disciples were inspired by the "holy

spirit" and went out to share the teaching of Christ in the streets of Jerusalem. *Acts* 2:41 says,

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about

3,000 souls." The very first day the church organization started in Jerusalem there were 3,000

people that joined. By the definition of a mega-church[8], which is two thousand members or

more, the church in Jerusalem, as seen in *Acts* chapter two, was a mega-church from the very

start. Understanding why numerical size is important is vital to understanding how a pastor or

church is seen as successful. In this passage, the numbers added were "souls" that were baptized

into "the faith." This was not just an ordinary Sunday morning church service where people

came to a gathering just because they wanted to come hear a good preacher teach or a worship-

band play music. This was an actual life changing experience for these 3,000 individuals that

saved their souls, according to the Bible. The fact that these individuals were not just counted as

members of a church so that an organization could grow is crucial to understand. The importance

of the number shown here in *Acts* was that thousands of souls were saved for eternity. This

seems to be the reason that so many pastors emphasize growth, not so their fellowship or

organization grows but so that souls are saved and begin to take part in this walk of the Christian

faith.

Though the desire to "save souls" is typically viewed as the core motive underlying a

church's need for numeric growth, many pastors appear to re-interpret this tenet to emphasize

primarily quantitative, rather than qualitative, growth. Pastor Isaiah confronts this issue when he

says,

> I think most American pastors would love to have a bigger church. Very few guys
> are content with the size of the church currently is. I think that a good percentage
> of the American clergy has bought into the lie that success is his growth of nickels
> and noses. It's hard because of economic times like this because it makes it harder
> to measure. Typical mainline denominations are decreasing. And the churches
> that are growing in nickels and noses evoke a huge response of jealousy or other
> pastors will attack them by saying they're doing this or that wrong. Some of that

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[8] A mega-church is defined as a congregation having an average weekly attendance of 2,000 in a worship service. See website: http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html.

might be true and some of that might be jealousy, but I think there is a pressure to sometimes keep up with the Joneses even in the churches. I live and preach in a community where there are several great churches around. If you want to go to a church that has great worship you can go here, if you want to get a church that fits all your time needs you can go there. You have to know who you are what you really believe and what God has called you to do. (Interview with Pastor Isaiah, September 2010)

Here Pastor Isaiah is critical of the fact that many pastors in the church organization seem to only strive to grow as an issue of pride and power. There seems to be a capitalist competition for the Christians in this area. In order to attract their "share" of potential church members, they have to keep competing for their attention. As Isaiah states, prospective congregation members have numerous options when it comes to selecting a church. A church's success can arguably be viewed in winning these Christians from neighboring churches. By looking at this from a capitalist competition point-of-view, more members could simply mean that one church is better than another church because it would have more potential tithers, increased membership, and more saved souls. Thus, the idea of profit for the church can be understood as encompassing economic, numeric, and spiritual dimensions.

Though Isaiah seems to be against area churches competing for potential members, he looks at it from a realist's standpoint as well. As a church numerically grows in members, resources, and facilities, there is much more to maintain from an economic standpoint. He explains,

I think there is a temptation that we all want to grow and it's hard not to fall into. You get into a place like the size of our fellowship, not that we're big but having about 1000 members, a school with about 700 students, and a preschool of about 150 students, starts adding up the communities that we have touched here and our community is pretty big. We have to keep the lights on, is that's what God has for us, so in essence we need a certain threshold to make what were doing work and so that's another pressure. And if you have a little house church you don't really have that pressure. It's almost like the bigger the build the more that you have to

have, almost what you have to sustain could becomes a burden and a temptation. Now we have 100,000 square-foot air-conditioned facility, when you include the schools we have to have certain numbers to make that work. I don't think that's our overarching drive, but I think that that's the reality. There is a temptation to grow, there is the need to maintain if that's what you feel God wants for you, and I don't know of anyone that would say that they think God wants them to be half the church that they are right now. (Interview with Pastor Isaiah, September 2010)

Isaiah paints a complex portrait of the struggles that many pastors face when they lead church organizations. With the resources and buildings that many churches operate, it is hard not to separate the idea of maintaining and growing in members in order to take care of the needs to facilitate the upkeep of the church. As material costs are introduced into the church, numerical church growth, is simply a practical way to be faithful to God. However, this creates a tension between the numeric growth seen in *Acts* chapter 2 and Christ's words in *John* chapter 6. Here Christ tells the multitudes following him they must "eat his flesh to remain in him" and, thus, to inherit eternal life. Shortly after this in chapter 6 of *John* says that many disciples stopped following Christ after this teaching because this was a hard teaching for them to grasp. It almost seems that Christ intended to reduce the number of individuals following him with this hard teaching.

Is Pastor Isaiah right to assume that no one would want a church that is half of the size as the one they currently attend? Regardless, this tension still exists. A congregation that grows out of genuine adherence to church spiritual teachings (or a focus on "souls being saved"), is looked upon favorably according to the pastors. But can the same be said when a church grows just to "keep up with the Joneses" of church culture as is stated above? If numeric growth is the only matrix for measuring church success, then growth because of "souls being saved" and maintaining organizational viability in church culture are both accepted. However, I wonder if

Christ would say the same thing. Would He look at it from a matrix of faithfulness, numeric growth, or both?

"Healthy Things Grow"

So for many pastors, the concept of measuring pastoral and church success has been based on the membership growth within the congregation. These pastors see growth as a direct and positive reflection of their ministerial work. Two of the pastors forthrightly stated that success could first and foremost be defined by numeric growth. They seemed to think that the best way to determine church success was examine church service activity and attendance. Not only did these two pastors seem to view numeric growth as the best measurement for success, but they both felt that healthy organisms or organizations, specifically churches, grow and that is their desire. This takes the idea of measuring success by numeric growth one step further than some of the other pastors talking about growth. Pastor Issac, put it this way:

> I believe that we are going to grow. Healthy churches grow, and we are committed to being a healthy church. If you want to be a part of that, with no expectations and limitations on what the church is going to become, if it's a mega church or not, that's God's issue. I have to live my life like we're 400 people beyond what we are right now. We are at 700 people, but I'm thinking about us as 1200...1600 people. (Interview with Pastor Isaac, July 2010)

Some pastors linked their arguments of growth as a positive outcome to natural phenomenon. In nature, if an object, substance, animal, or being is not growing properly, then it is considered to be unhealthy. Conventional views in American society hold that when girls and women do not grow into the hegemonic ideals of beauty or fitness, and boys and men do not grow into the hegemonic construct of masculinity, strength and power, they are often labeled as unhealthy or otherwise not "ideal" by American society. Social theorists Michel Foucault and

Pierre Bourdieu argue that these hegemonic ideals (or norms) are social constructs established by dominant institutions in an effort to retain power over "unhealthy" or "deviant" individuals by labeling them as weaker or abnormal (Foucault 1977, Bourdieu 1990). In the context of church culture, the hegemonic assumption is that healthy churches grow—this dominant idea continues to keep the larger churches growing while smaller churches often die off.

Hegemony, a theoretical concept developed by political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971) defines hegemony as "a dominant system of lived meanings and values" internalized by a group of people or larger population (Williams 1977:108). The concept of hegemony is useful in this study because it encourages an analysis of the dominant and unquestioned norms of thinking (hegemonic constructs) that are maintained in the church culture and internalized by the members and pastors. Pastor Andrew's assertion that success equals growth and, therefore, health reiterates this idea:

> Here you go. Growth. It's that simple. To me, the whole way nature works is healthy things grow. Whether it's one a year or 1,000 a year, if you're reaching out and people are excited about what you're doing, I think that's successful. Who are we to put any number or goal… well, yeah, if a church is losing people or not reaching new people, I don't know how you can look at that Scripturally and think, yeah, we're getting it done. It's on every level; it's more staff or less staff and more volunteer ownership, whatever the vision of the church is. Because if you trust that it's God's vision that the leader is following. Who has a vision of not growing? That's the way God works. Why are we told in Acts 2 that there were 3,000 added to the church. Why is that in there if numbers don't matter? Why does it tell us that there were 5,000 people and he broke them up into groups of 50 and 100. It's so you get this idea, this scope, it's like those are important. Gideon led the army. God broke the army of 3,000 people from 32,000. You can't hate numbers because they're in Scripture. God uses it to say, look at what's happening here, churches are growing up here, people are getting saved. Not growth for the sake of numbers, but growth because the vision is being fulfilled. (Interview with Pastor Andrew, September 2010)

As I earlier noted, many interviewed pastors define the success of a church as being faithful to carry out to completion of what God has asked that individual to do. In light of this definition, many of the smaller churches in America that are not growing numerically are still successful, despite the static numbers of their congregations. If they are presumably supposed to *disciple* and *grow* the Christians in their been charged with caring for, and this is being faithful to what God has asked them to do, then my father's church is a good example of this kind of understanding. However, this goes against the dominant idea that, as Andrew termed it, "healthy things grow." Again, Pastor Issac sums up this tension in his discussion of church success:

> Number one, numeric growth. That's the bias that I begin with. Number two is changed lives. I mean that by, not that you've taught them a moral principle that helps them live better, but that people have realized that the problem is not what they do, it's who they are. I see success as people coming to the realization that they're sinners and turning their lives over to Christ. So for us it's salvation. A lot of times you find guys like evangelist or guys, like Chandler or Driscoll, that focus just on deepening Christians. A successful church is one that does both. I think as we move forward into the future, we're not going to see this old argument over atttractional versus missional, we're going to see these two things come together. That's what a church is. When you have a church that's only about evangelism or just discipleship, you have two halves of a broken church. That it's not an either-or. It's called "And." (Interview with Pastor Isaac, July 2010)

Here, Isaac agrees with the dominant ideology about church growth and success. He also says that there are very influential mega-church pastors such as Matt Chandler and Mark Driscoll—who are voices of authority in church culture today—who would say being successful is simply focusing on deepening the faith and walk of people that have already professed to be Christians. These pastors, rooted in a Reformed theology perspective, may say that the preservation and equipping of the saints is more important than the seeking of new converts that would thus lead to numeric growth of a church.

However, Isaac seems to think that being successful involves growing, seeing lives changed, and helping people come to faith in Christ. Likewise, it is also discipling current Christians to these ideals and practices. Instead of being successful by only training current members or increasing a congregation numerically, he feels that success is defined by both elements. For him, a successful church grows and has discipled members. This ideal seems to be more congruent with what the *New Testament* teaches in Luke chapter 10 about desiring to see people come to know who Christ is and to deepen their walk with Him at the same time.

Numeric Growth Does Not Equate Faithfulness

Clearly numerical growth, as four of the pastors have indicated, is the most popular—and perhaps easiest—way to measure the success of their adherence to God's mission. For them, measuring numeric growth is the most tangible way of determining whether or not the message, vision, and mission are connecting with people. It seems that if people are interested in what the church has to offer then, more people will come than they would otherwise. However, eight pastors argued that numeric growth by itself is insufficient in accurately measuring church and pastoral faithfulness and success.

Numerous pastors conveyed that large church congregations do not necessarily equate with faithfulness to God. There seems to be an underlying understanding that if a church expands because of unsound doctrine then it is unfaithful to God, and, thus, unsuccessful. The scriptures warn against this type of numeric growth out of a selfish ambition when it says in book of 2 *Timothy*,

> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to
> have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in

accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 *Timothy* 4:3-4, *NASB Version*)

Here, Paul, the author of most of the *New Testament*, warns the young minister Timothy that many people will make up their own doctrine and beliefs as a way to gain possessions, even if this doctrine is different from Christ's teachings. The Prosperity Gospel, or the Word of Faith Movement, that teaches that financially giving to a church organization or pastor means that God will bless them financially is prevalent in many cultures.

In the Prosperity Gospel, the pastors claim that God wants everyone to be wealthy and have materials possessions in this life. Many Prosperity Gospel pastors takes verses like *Malachi 3:10*, *Deuteronomy 8:18*, *John 10:10*, and *3 John 2-4* out of context from what the Bible is trying to emphasize to defend their theology. They state that if people support their ministry and claim God's blessings, then He will make them financially better off and successful in life. However, in most cases, people who subscribe to the Prosperity Gospel teaching remain just as poor (or even become poorer), while the pastors and leaders of this movement flourish financially at the expense of their congregation. Many of the pastors gave the example of Joel Osteen and his church organization in Houston, Texas. This cycle of escalating socioeconomic stratification between the Prosperity Gospel pastors and their members has been documented by religious studies scholars Milmon Harrison (2005) and Kirk MacGregor (2007).

Although the Prosperity Gospel has infiltrated Mainstream America church culture, it is not the predominant perspective, of pastors interviewed for this study. While they may believe that numeric growth indicates a healthy and faithful church, they do not claim that everything they pray in the name of God will lead to success. In fact, several pastors did not think that membership growth significantly related to living out the pastor's or congregation's. Pastor

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Elijah, an older pastor who has led a smaller, older congregation for the better part of 20 years, addresses this issue. His experience with the same congregation is important in understanding that success is not solely defined by membership growth. From an outsider's perspective, Elijah's little church that has decreased in size the last few years could be considered a financial failure. However, his stance on measuring the success of a church only on the economic blessings and the size of a fellowship below is an important discourse.

> I think size has very little to do with. I think that regardless of how small or how large the churches, in some respects I feel that the larger you get the harder it becomes in a lot of ways, but I think that the call to live like Christ and become like Christ has nothing to do with size. Its very interesting, on several occasions, there's a large crowd following Jesus like in *Luke* 14, and I think about how much time I spent thinking, boy would it be nice to have a large church. Whenever you go to any convention or conference that is modeled on stage and is pushed on you as the speakers that you hear are all from large churches. But it's interesting to me that in *Luke* 14 there is a large crowd following Jesus and he turns around and proceeds to say if you don't hate your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, or even your own life he can't be my disciple. As if Jesus is not really impressed with larger crowds. And it almost seems like he had said, I want to see how many of you are really understanding what I mean, almost like he purposely tried to thin them out. (Interview with Pastor Elijah, June 2010)

Not only does Elijah state here that he thinks size has very little to do with a church's success, but he might say the opposite in that size has nothing to do with success. He tells the story of Christ challenging people that they must even "hate" their own lives to follow him. At the end of this story in *Luke* 14, and similar to *John* 6, many found this teaching too challenging, and stopped following Christ. The idea that Christ cared little about the number of His followers him and even caused some to stop following Him can be seen in these teachings from *Luke* and *John*. If Christ does not worry about numbers, could this be an indication of what he defines as success? If Christ's teachings are the inspiration that these pastors claim to follow, then it

appears that Christ would tell them to worry less about the number of people attending their church organizations as a measure of success.

One of the most plainspoken pastors about this issue was Pastor Peter. His church has about 2,000 members, yet when asked whether the size of his church lead to the success of his church he said,

> No absolutely not, in fact I think that the bigger the congregation the more challenging it is. Because the key is according, go back to *Acts* chapter 2 verses 45-47, he said that they continued to meet daily breaking bread and prayer and devoting themselves to the apostles teaching. So to me that is what the essence of what church is about. So when people come in are they committed to prayer, are they committed to the apostles teachings and discipleship, are they committed to fellowship, are they committed to breaking bread in those things. So one would have to again look and see are those dynamics happening in the greater function and flow of the church, if they are then I think that church is being effective. But just having a large crowd on Sunday because they have a big building and they're on television and they have a big budget and they have a famous person it's in the pulpit, but they don't do anything with it during the week, I don't think they're being successful. That's why one has to be very careful, I'm not the judge. Jesus will judge us and I will represent my congregation when I stand before him and all the other ministries that are led while I was there. So only he knows what will burn up in the fire what was hay and stubble or that which survives, the gold and silver and precious stones. (Interview with Pastor Peter, September 2010)

The fact that a mega-church pastor thinks that size has very little to do with a congregation's faith seems initially paradoxical and adds a layer of complexity to the issue. Pastor Peter seemed to think that some churches grew simply because they had resources that other churches may not have, and that this numeric growth was not an indication of faithfulness. He was not the only mega-church pastor that held this perspective. I told all of the pastors the story of my father, and the resounding response to what he did in rural East Tennessee was that he was a "hero of the faith." The fact that my father never received any accolades or that he did not grow his fellowship in his 15 years of faithful service did not seem to matter to these pastors.

Being faithful to the "calling" that God placed on my father's life seemed to be the only thing that they considered.

While membership growth could be viewed as an indicator of a church or a pastor being faithful to God's calling, this is not always the case. The same can be said for a small fellowship that may never grow in size. Just because the size of the church does not increase does not mean that the church or the pastor are unsuccessful or unfaithful to the calling of God on their lives. This is an interesting dichotomy the pastors have to consider, as they constantly try to determine if their growth is from being faithful to God or because they are facilitating the growth themselves out of their own resources. Clearly, the size of a church, whether small or large, can both be a positive and negative in being successful in ministry.

Numeric Size Can be a Positive and Negative to Success

The issue of numerical size is complex, and the representatives of the pastors held differing perspectives. Although four of the pastors feel that numeric growth of the size of their congregation is an indication of success, not every pastor feels that way. According to the pastors, there is tension between a positive and negative feeling of church size and how it can impact congregational dynamics. To understand how this kind of dichotomy can exist within a single sub-set of a single faith, one should explore the different perspectives of pastors. Does the numeric size of a congregation have any affect on the living out of their faithfulness and the success as a congregation?

Over half of the pastors seemed to have a very positive view of having a large congregation, even though they might admit that they face particular challenges related to

managing a larger church. The pastors' biggest concern apparently relates to creating a sense of

community and closeness with a larger church. Obviously, the more people that attend a church,

the easier it is to get lost in the masses of people. With too many people attending a church it

may be hard for individuals to actually connect with other people on a more intimate and

personal level. One pastor, David, said if a larger church can overcome this type of

disconnection and lack of community, its large size is a very positive and maybe even desired

result. He states this when he says,

> If the larger church can maintain close community I think then it is actually more beneficial because you can have a lot more horsepower as a church. If people get lost in the sauce and don't tap into community, which is their option I can't make them and there's a while where they're researching things out and don't want to be in community because they're not even sure if it's legitimate and they don't want people to know the deep dark ugly stuff about their life, so you better not force it on them. But the environments and the opportunities need to be available. So I think a large church can provide that opportunity but people can also get lost if you're not careful. (Interview with Pastor David, August 2010)

As Pastor David explains, the chance to do more and create more connecting

opportunities for people emerges when there are more people involved in a church. However, he

mentions repeatedly that there is a chance with larger churches that people get lost in the crowd.

Someone in a large church could come in one Sunday, sit down for the worship service, leave,

and never really meet anyone or connect on a personal basis with any other members of the

church. As I discuss in the next chapter, this is often times facilitated by a consumer-like

mentality, in which people just come to "consume" a Sunday service and never look to engage in

any other way. If this is the case, as the instances above indicate, the congregates are not being

faithful individually to doing what God wants them to do, then that church may not be as

successful as they may like to be.

One pastor's opinion on the size of a congregation was in stark contrast to many of the

pastors' feeling that having larger congregations can be positive. Unlike Pastor David's

viewpoint, Pastor Caleb felt that growing too large is a negative, and, in fact, sinful. He states,

"I'm personally becoming more and more convicted that if you grow any larger than say 500 to

800 that you're sinful. That you're not a sending church, and you're not multiplying the way that

Jesus intended" (Interview, Pastor Caleb, July 2010). Caleb does not think that large mega-

churches can be faithful to what God wants, and feels that a church should be "sending and

multiplying" (discussed below). Rather than trying to gather a lot of people in a service on a

Sunday morning defining, Caleb sees success as the ability to grow in order for a church to *give*.

This *giving* attitude is more congruent with the investment ideal of faithfulness that is

demonstrated in the parable of the talents. As Christ shows in the parable, where people that are

given more talents use those talents for God's purposes, they are given talents to do more for

God. This is an interesting dichotomy where some pastors feel that larger numbers can help in

the living out of a congregation's faithfulness and success, while one seems to think that growing

too large is sinful and antithetical to living faithfully for the purposes of God.

Though some of the pastors disagree on size, they seem to all agree on the fact that a

church should be giving itself away in some form. For the larger fellowships of which Pastor

David is speaking, it may be giving away resources and financial help to different urban areas,

which, he claims, only a larger fellowship can do. For Pastor Caleb, that giving away meant

sending out people as they get to a certain size. Here they would send out members to help

churches in other areas, rather than growing too large, which he claims is "sinful." Pastor

Benjamin touches on how these two different ideals can help each other. He says,

I can't help but think it's a complimentary thing. I think it's easier if the larger and the smaller fellowships work together. We all have the same challenges, whether you have 25 or 25,000 people. We all have people in the pew going, " I need to receive." And we need to transform those people to knowing, you're not the taker, you're the giver. So you will receive when you learn how to give. Push it out; it will come back to you. (Interview with Pastor Benjamin, August 2010)

Benjamin feels that the size of a congregation is not the issue, but church attendee's consumer-based mentality. He feels that helping congregations to understand they should *give* instead of *take* is crucial. He believes that when people, and churches, learn how to give, then more will come back to them in return. His position makes even more sense when one understands that Benjamin is a mega-church pastor of one of the largest and most generous churches in the area. When I asked the other pastors to give an example of a faithful and successful church, many of them referred back to his church and the generosity that they have shown over the years of faithful service to the community and other churches. While size can be viewed from both a positive and negative standpoint, the issue to the pastors comes down to the same thing: giving resources away.

Success Defined in Multiplication and Giving Resources Away

Initially we saw the pastors discuss the inextricable connection between faithfulness and success, and the multiple stances on the church's size in relation to the faith-success connection, but each, in various ways, also hinted at one of the manifestations of that connection: the redistribution of resources. *Matthew* 28 might be where this link between giving resources away and the multiplication of members stems from; chapter 28:19 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." In order to expand into all the nations, a congregation must be willing to let their members leave, and thus "give them away" in order to make more disciples.

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When asked what success of a church was, 14 of the pastors referred to multiplying disciples and giving away resources to help in the kingdom of God. As Pastor Michael, leader of a fast growing church that has planted ten other churches in its eight years in existence, says:

> I think the gospel necessarily calls us outward and that's after all what Jesus Christ did. He left heaven and inched into the messiness of humanity to redeem it and that's the same mission of the church. And it should be reflected in how many people we send out our mission locally and globally and how much money we send out, not necessarily how much we gather or obtain. That isn't even a bad indicator as long as the proportion is even, because the more we get in the more we get to send out, so I'm all about that. (Interview with Pastor Michael, 2010)

Michael is clear in saying that he wants more people and more resources to come into his fellowship so that he can send more out. He interprets his approach as faithfulness because that is what Christ did for humanity. For him the faithfulness of his church is not in how many people or resources they can gather as a congregation, but rather how many people and resource they can send out to redeem humanity to Christ. This is a common theme, but clearly evident beyond Michael's church fellowship.

Many other pastors spoke of multiplying, reproducing, or giving themselves away in terms of people and resources as well. As one other pastors stated, "Think of successful church is one that is giving themselves away just as part of their DNA, it is just what they do" (Interview, Pastor James, August 2010). Pastor Joseph, who is the pastor of the fastest growing church in a very wealthy area of Orlando, agrees with Pastor James here. Although James focuses on serving the homeless and Pastor Joseph serving the rich, they both agree that success is about giving, not taking. Joseph states:

> A big thing in the system I'm a part of is reproducing. Healthy things multiply. We want to scatter, not to hold. Small groups, staff, churches should all reproduce. See God spread it out. Gives the church a sense that the body of Christ is much bigger than just our little place. It gives people a vision for the church,

lifting up the mission and the work of the church. (Interview with Pastor Joseph, July 2010)

These pastors seem to think that helping their congregation know that God wants them to "give themselves away" or "spread it out" is crucial to being faithful to the mission of Christ. Instead of trying to keep all of their resources so they can preserve their church congregation, they emphasize that they should disseminate it so that other people might understand whom Christ is and how He impacts their lives. Essentially, if the pastors can help more people come to know about and follow Christ by giving away resources and people, then that is what they should do to be successful.

Pastor Samuel leads an established church with many older, wealthy members. Their church building, however, sits in the middle of a lower socioeconomic area. This kind of counter-intuitive image neatly illustrates the idea of giving away resources to help people come to know God through Christ that ministers, like Pastor Samuel, strive for:

> A healthy congregation that's being successful is devoting much of their resources, their time, their treasure, their talents to move people to know God through Jesus Christ. And in their devoting a significant portion of their time, talents, treasures, to taking those who have just come to know Him and developing them to grow in Christ to a place of maturity, to where that now they really understand how their new worldview relates to every level of their life, both their personal level, their rational level, their mind, their volitional level, their actions, and their emotional level, their feeling. (Interview with Pastor Samuel, August 2010)

For pastors like Samuel, it appears that success and faithfulness come back to using the resources that a church has in order to help people have their lives changed by Christ. Success for these pastors appears to be about authentic, personal change in the hearts of people inside and outside of their congregations. Here again, we can see the image of the faithful and unfaithful servants from the parable above. The faithful servant used his resources to benefit the master, while the

unfaithful servant just kept the money given to him. It is clear that the faithful servant in the modern day church gives resources away to see souls saved to Christ. Unfaithful servants are those who keep all of their resources and people in the church organization and they do not see a souls saved to Christ. In short, for today's church, faithfulness, and, thus, success, is more about giving away than retaining, and more about transforming lives than gathering large numbers and crowds. It appears these pastors are trying to be "good and faithful" servants from an external point of view.

Discussion: What is Success Then?

As I demonstrated in this chapter, the definition of success for these pastors is defined in myriad ways. They define success by being faithful to Christ, seeing more Christians actively living out their faith, and seeing more people converting to the Christian faith. In all of the pastoral interviews, such sentiments are manifest throughout their discourse on success.

The question that could be asked is, "Is this definition of success consistent for all pastors of church culture?" It may be best to consider sociologist's Emile Durkheim's definitions of a social fact and social currents to answer this question. Much of Durkheim's narrative in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method* is devoted to exploring the definition of a social fact, looking at social currents, establishing a definition of a "social thing," and differentiating between so-called normal and pathological social facts. In defining a social fact, Durkheim argues, "A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual and external constraint" (2001:59). Here, Durkheim defines a social fact as any social norm that is external to an individual and is imposed on individuals in a social setting. These facts do not

originate from an individual, but they have a social origin. It is important to understand that social facts are external from individuals so that the researchers can study a social norm that is important in a specific culture or society.

According to Durkheim (2001:53), the idea of success as faithfulness to Christ and the expansion of Christ's influence is a social current that can, "sweep us along in spite of ourselves." This social current starts external to, and prior to pastors' appropriation of these concepts, given that "it is indisputable today that most of our ideas and tendencies are not developed by ourselves, but come to us from outside, they can only penetrate us by imposing themselves upon us" (Durkheim, 2001:52).

Where did this social fact or current come from in the church culture that faithfulness and growth equaled success? Max Weber and his study of Calvinism in the capitalist United States provides a useful starting point. As discussed in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, this idea began with the spirit of capitalism that flourished from the Calvinistic and Protestant work ethic (Weber 1905). A major focus of the Protestant work ethic was to do one's best and work hard no matter what profession one pursued. The concepts of hard work and consistency parallels pastors' idea of faithfulness to Christ. Being faithful to Christ is understood as a mission to do the best one can with the resources that an individuals was given by God. Doing ones best would normally mean gaining in resources, or the number of converts in this case; faithfulness inherent in this approach would lead to success. Drawing on Durkheim, one may argue that this social fact and idea was established over time and then influenced the following generations as a social norm, thereby shaping various aspects of modern day church culture.

Durkheim observes similar influences in the socialization of children by particular cultural norms (2001:53-54). If the conceptualization of success as faithfulness and growth began back when capitalism first flourished and the protestant work ethic thrived as Weber discusses, then this social fact has been passed down through generations of Christians, and has shaped their social construct of success. Underscoring the importance of social facts as behavior-shaping, Durkheim argues (2001:60) that social facts are "things" and that people intuitively form ideas about "things" around us, and in turn these ideas form their behaviors. As pastors are conditioned to believe success is in faithfulness and numeric growth, this social fact and "thing" influence future generations' understanding of success as well as behavior "for success." Durkheim states (2001:61) these things will in the end be considered either useful or negative for a person, or that "thing" will be of service or disservice to facilitate goals and desires. This may be why faithfulness and numeric growth is seen as success by the pastors: both are useful to them—one keeps them in line with the God they worship, and the other helps fulfill his command from *Matthew 28*. It follows that, if they are faithful pastors of a church in the community, then they will influence that community, and help create social facts of their own, leading to more social influence inside and outside of their congregation.

After hearing the pastors speak about success, I would argue that the social fact for this subculture is that success is tied into faithfulness to God first, and secondly to multiplying the number of Christians. These two elements seem to be mutually reinforcing as well. If a pastor is unfaithful to God, he will not be able to help multiply followers of Christ. Likewise, if he is not making more disciples of Christ, he is being unfaithful by not doing what Christ tells him to do in *Matthew 28*. In essence, the social fact of success for a pastor cannot be dichotomized into an

"either/or" mentality of faithfulness versus growth, but rather it has to be a "both/and" pursuit of success through spiritual faithfulness and numeric growth. One cannot exist without the other, and that is the social fact of success for these pastors. The following chapter explores some of the challenges that the pastors face in their congregations.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSING THE MAJOR PROBLEMS THE PASTORS OBSERVE WITHIN THEIR CONGREGATIONS AND CHURCH CULTURE AT LARGE

The first two chapters of this thesis describe who the pastors are personally, what they believe about congregational leadership, and what they believe the Bible teaches about success. After coming to understand the pastors' subjectivity of these areas, the interview questions shifted to address some of the problems they see affecting contemporary church culture. Although the pastors acknowledged that there are several problems, there were three predominant issues that stood out consistently: (1) the overwhelming debt of both church organizations and the congregation members; (2) the rampant materialism and consumerism of church members; (3) and the extreme individualism of members in the church. This chapter explores how these problems are shaping and directing much of the church culture today.

Before discussing these issues, it is necessary to point out that some mainstream Christian pastors, specifically David Platt, are currently speaking out on many of these issues in the church culture. Platt, an author and pastor of a mega-church in Birmingham, Alabama, discusses in his book, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (2010), what he sees as the biggest problem in the American Christianity. He states that the objective of, what is generally perceived as, the American Dream is to advance oneself with hard work, ingenuity, and innovation. This enables individuals to obtain everything they could want. In the church community, Platt explains that individuals feel obtaining more things (having a safe life and obtaining the American Dream) is the goal for most contemporary American Christians, rather than the radical call of the Gospel to give up everything they have for Christ. Platt also claims that living for Christ is more than living a Christian "spin" on the *American Dream*. Overall,

Platt observes that contemporary American church culture today seems to have departed from what Christ wanted for his Church.

I mention this argument of Christians in the American church culture substituting the radical call of Christ's Gospel for a Christian version of the *American Dream* because the narratives in this study suggest that it is the underlying reason for the three major problems in the church as outlined above. Debt, consumerism, and individualism all seem to stem from the pursuit of the American Dream and not the pursuit of a life centered on Christ's teachings. Pastor Caleb agrees with Platt when he says,

> I think the statement that he [Platt] makes when he says that it is more than having a nice life. That we have been trapped by the American dream and the pursuit of the American dream to have more and more and more and more has now become the new standard of being a Christian in North America. I think he's right, I think that's been a real detriment to the church. (Interview with Pastor Caleb, July 2010)

Has the American Dream become a detriment to the church as Pastor Caleb states suggests? Almost half of these pastors, during the interviews, pointed back to Platt's discussion of American Dream as an explanation of the influence on the church members as a whole.

Discussing the Three Major Problems in the Church Culture

When I asked the pastors if there are problems in contemporary American church culture, their answers included the same three issues for their respective churches. The first issue that many of the pastors alluded to was increasing debt. Not only are many church goers consumed with debt, but many of the church organizations are as well. According to the statistical study reported by a leading credit card website, the average credit card debt per American household in

2010 was around $14,750[9]. That number does not include mortgage, automobile, or student loan debts. This debt number represents the average American household, which includes church members and continues to rise as people spend money they do not have. Of the 20 pastors that I interviewed, 12 of them spoke of having overwhelming debt from their buildings and other areas of spending.

The second problem the pastors described was that of consumerism and materialism. As David Platt says (2010), it seems that church members are concerned with furthering themselves and personally obtaining wealth. This consumerism can be seen in the average American household's amount of credit card debt, and it does not seem to differ between those outside the church and those inside it. This seems to oppose the teaching from *Romans 13:8* that says, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law."

The final problem that many of the pastors mentioned in contemporary American church culture is the concern that individualism is posing a barrier for members of the church from developing a deep sense of community within the church congregation. Many of the pastors stated the American focus on the individual has hindered the progress of the deep and authentic community as depicted in the early *New Testament* church. This individualism has caused members of the church to separate themselves from letting others have intimate knowledge of their lives. Because people want to maintain their individuality, they are reluctant to let a pastor, or anyone other than oneself, challenge their thinking on what are Biblical truths. This individualism seems to influence consumerism as well. If individuals are not satisfied with the

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[9] See website: www.creditcard.com and http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php

current state of their present church, or if someone tells them something they do not want to hear, there are plenty of other churches to go to in a given area. Individualism creates "church shoppers," or people who move from church to church all of their lives. Essentially, this individualism and consumerism among Christians communicates that what individuals get out of church is more important than what churches are doing together in the community. Conversely, these tendencies can also drive some churches to cater to followers, as though to attract consumers to a product.

Same Problems, Different Age

The dominant culture has always had an influence on the culture of the church. Even in Christ's time as well as the *New Testament* church, the dominant Roman culture influenced the patterns of the church. As the pastors and I began to discuss the main problems they perceived to in the contemporary church, two pastors were quick to state they felt the problems in today's church culture are not much different than they were many years ago in the early church. Pastor Jeremiah was the first to introduce this idea. When I asked him to elaborate on the connection he said,

> I'm not sure they're any different than the problems that were faced by the church in the *New Testament*. I can't remember who said it, maybe it was Charles Spurgeon, "that all the old devils dress up in the same suits and creep back into the pews." (Interview with Pastor Jeremiah, July 2010)

I was surprised by this statement and asked him to clarify further the problems he thought persist nowadays from the first century. He elaborated as follows,

> A lack of commitment to Christ, and a love for comfort more than their love for the radical call of the Gospel. In some places there is an over-emphasis on of

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everyone holding hands and loving each other to the exclusion of everyone else which in the end is antithetical to its actual desire. There some places that are so corporate that if you took Jesus out of the equation the church would run the exact same way, and I'm not sure that's okay. And then there are some places that are so dysfunctional that they refuse to get their ducks in a row. No dysfunction should stop the gospel of Christ so they use that to excuse the kind of corporate function that's required just to keep the lights on and make things go. Some people are so driven by what they think church is supposed to look like in their mind that they don't stop to think about what God wants for his church to look like in this season of the ministry. (Interview with Pastor Jeremiah, July 2010)

Jeremiah clearly argues that no new struggles have developed for the church in the last 2,000 years. It appears this lack of commitment to Christ parallels the extreme individualism of Americans I will discuss below. This individualism leads to not committing too deeply to community since individuals typically desire freedom to maintain multiple options, including the ability to go to another church if something satisfies them better. The "love of comfort" among the members that Pastor Jeremiah describes parallels consumerism and materialism found in the church organization today—the extravagant church buildings that are built to make individuals involved feel comfortable are evidence of that mentality. Just like the Roman culture influenced the early *New Testament* church, capitalism is affecting American church culture today.

At first I was not sure that I agreed with Jeremiah that the *New Testament* church had the same problems as the church culture today. However, as I began to consider his statement and study the *New Testament* church in the book of *Acts,* I started to understand the connection between the past and present and the consistent struggle of the church against the dominant culture. A week later, as I was reviewing my interview notes and transcriptions, my conversation with Pastor John immediately stood out as he, in different words, echoed Pastor Jeremiah's

perspective about the influence of the Roman Empire and dominant culture on the church in

Rome. When I asked Pastor John whether there are problems in today's church culture he stated,

> Of course, but it's not just today it's from the time that Constantine got converted
> to Christianity in 312 A.D. and when the church became associated with the state.
> In something like 384 A.D. with Arcadius the church was always connected with
> power and power came from money and politics. The Protestant Reformation
> tried to separate itself from that to some extent but the Protestant Reformation got
> caught up in the Protestant work ethic, which was work hard to make money.
> Now Wesley said earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. We got
> to earn all you can and the generation before got to save all you can, and they
> gave what they could or what they wanted to. The Boomer generation lost the
> save all you can so they just got the gain all you can, so the savings were zero and
> giving all you can was zero. (Interview with Pastor John, June 2010)

As Pastor John explains, ever since Constantine used the church as a way to leverage political

power, the church has struggled with separating itself from the larger forces of prosperity and

power. John sees the reflection of Weber's Protestant work ethic, discussed in the introduction

and in chapter two, as a force that is infiltrating the lives of individuals in the church culture and

influencing their desire to earn money and work hard. Somewhere along the way, Wesley's

concept of generous living and the "save all you can and give all you can" (Weber 1958) aspects

were lost in translation. Instead, this Protestant work ethic facilitated consumerism, materialism,

and individualism that are plaguing the church today.

As these two pastors show, the problems of the church culture are no different now than

they were thousands of years ago. At first this disheartened me about the future of the American

church. However, since this challenge has been going on for so long, it seems unlikely that there

are any simple answers to this issue. In fact, the length of this debate has made clear to me there

are more important questions underlying these predicaments. As I continued to conduct

interviews and analyze the narratives, I became more hopeful as potential answers began to

present themselves. I thought back to John's observation about the influence of the Roman emperors on the early church and his conclusion that the church organization has always been comprised of people who reflect the dominant social trends, and who, in turn, shape the direction of the church. Constantine and Arcadius had an influence on church culture by intertwining it with the state. Similarly, the current dominant culture of consumerism, materialism, and individualism has significant influences on the church that is reflected at both the organizational level of the church as well as at the level of individual pastors and members.

The Church is Comprised of Members of American Culture

It is important to understand that the church culture is made up of individuals that have been raised to pursue the American Dream. Is there, as E. Paul Durrenberger and Dimitra Doukas claim in their article *Gospel of Wealth, Gospel of Work: Counterhegemony in the U.S. Working Class*, a gospel of wealth in the America culture and church (2008)? For many in the church culture, pursuing the American Dream has been equated to pursuing God's dream, or in other words, what God wants for every Christians' life. The dominant capitalist culture of America appears to infiltrate every American Christian's social construction of their faith. Pastor Elijah alludes to this point when he states,

> There's no question that the culture, the American culture, we all grew up in it and we have adopted the American dream as not just our birthright as Americans, but sometimes as Christians. And one of the things that I think that I have said to our church is that the American dream is not God's dream, those two things are really different. It is not the two cars, two kids, two pets, and the white picket fence that is evil, when it becomes evil is when that becomes my goal. When I have a goal that is anything other than God, who he is, what he wants, that becomes evil and that can be anything. I think that in that sense that we really do believe that the American dream is somehow what God wants for our lives. And I'm not a socialist for sure, but we almost fill the sense that capitalism is

automatically Godly, but there's a lot of selfishness in our capitalist system and there are a lot of things that are wrong. I said I'm not a communist or I'm not a socialist, but any human system is broken because it is inhabited by broken simple people. (Interview with Pastor Elijah, June 2010)

He explains that the central element for understanding the individuals in the church culture mentality is that most American Christians equate capitalism with Godliness. Somewhere in the history of America, probably around the Industrial Revolution as Weber suggests, the Protestant work ethic and capitalism were deemed as Godly (1958). This ideal infiltrated the dominant culture then, and now the dominant culture projects these capitalist ideals as goals to which any good American Christian should strive. According to Elijah, church goers have been conditioned from their upbringing that God wants them to prosper. I began to call this concept *the culture of prosperity*.

The discourse on *the culture of prosperity* struck a chord with other pastors as it was very evident that many of them felt the same way that Elijah did. When I asked the pastors whether or not they felt there was a *culture of prosperity* in the church culture, the overwhelming response was yes. For the most part they agreed with his statement that the American Dream is passed down by the culture and the culture ultimately influences the ideals that people form in their minds. Pastor Matthew responded to the notion of a *culture of prosperity* in the church culture by saying,

> I would say that there is, I think that the reason that there is, is because there's a *culture of prosperity* in America. You look at the church of Corinth or you look at the church in Rome and those were two affluent areas in the church began to take on that dynamic of the surrounding culture. So part of the church's culture prosperity has come because we have been culturally prosperous and as a result of that there is a sense of entitlement. (Interview with Pastor Matthew, June 2010)

Matthew suggests here that this sense of entitlement stems from the dominant cultural ideals and influence. The affluence of the culture seems to have more influence on the individuals in the church than the teachings of Christ, as the members conform to *the culture of prosperity* seemingly without thinking about its origin.

Pastor Andrew affirmed how the *American Dream* and *the culture of prosperity* influence the individuals in church culture when he says,

> It's the whole American dream, dude. It's make as much as fast as you can, retire early, enjoy life and all the pleasures that you can get. And is that in the American church? Absolutely. As much as we would like to think we're a different culture. We're swimming in the culture. Our job is to really let people know how hollow that life really is. The interesting thing is people already know. They've made enough purchases of the big things that didn't fulfill, but I think is it in the church? Yeah, absolutely. (Interview with Pastor Andrew, September 2010)

Here he speaks of the tension that most pastors seem to deal with: they hope that the people in the church are different from the dominant culture, but they simultaneously understand that they are not. They are "swimming in the culture" and part of it, as Andrew observes. Pastor Andrew, along with all of the other interviewed pastors, want to show church goers that this culture is not the current in which they need to be swimming. However, it seems members in the church swim right along with the current of the culture. The current of culture seems to be too powerful for the pastors in to fight against and pull members out of, so it appears that members are just laying back and going along for the ride.

The Church and Individuals in the Church Have Too Much Debt

The influence of capitalism in the church culture may be seen most readily in the debt incurred by church members, and church organizations. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the

average American family is $14,750 in credit card debt, not including larger debts of home

mortgages, automobile, and student loans debt. The individuals in the church grapple with the

same predicaments, as the social current of debt is one that has overwhelmed American culture,

including the church culture, as a whole.

Pressured by the ubiquitous marketing of corporate interests, Americans seem unable to

keep themselves from consuming more and more materials and incurring more debt. Over the

last few decades, the average national income has increased and yet so has the national average

household debt. As resources and income increase, spending normally increases along side it,

keeping individuals in a constant cycle of needing more money and goods. Pastor Isaac points

out this inconsistency in the constant consumption of American people:

> In any given 10-year period of history, your income has gone up, but the reason
> why we always have no money is because we don't have any margin. Because as
> your income goes up, your lifestyle chases that. My income goes up 1000 dollars,
> my lifestyle chases that, my obligations chase it. Now I feel poor again. I think
> that's America as a whole. What my wife and I decided was that we were always
> going to live below our means. Our income has gone up, our lifestyle has not.
> (Interview with Pastor Isaac, July 2010)

Few people in American culture have the fortitude that Pastor Isaac and his wife display, setting

their cost of living and keeping it the same no matter their income. As he argues, people seem to

constantly let their lifestyle chase their income instead of making their income conform to a

more sustainable lifestyle—this reflects a capitalist construction of "need" as an ever escalating

necessity to add, upgrade, and expand ownership of good and consumption of services. The idea

that people can use credit cards to purchase whatever they want, whenever they want, facilitates

the growth and freedom of consumerism and materialism. However, many of the pastors feel this

freedom to use debt as a way to function in American culture is not freedom at all, but rather

bondage. Pastor Benjamin discussed how the thousands of individuals in his congregation, and

other congregations throughout America, are tied up in the bondage of consumer debt. He says,

> We're just about to go through an entire preaching year of being released from
> bondage. And one of the forms of bondage that our congregation has, and every
> congregation in our culture has, is financial bondage. There is an average of I
> think $34,000 dollars per family unit in consumer debt. That doesn't include the
> mortgage on the house. That's car payments, school debts and credit card. So
> we're taking all of our people through a Financial Peace University course. All of
> them. Which will initially get them out of financial bondage. We have several
> people who have gone through Financial Peace University, dozens and dozens, if
> not hundreds of people. We had a displaying table of the cut up credit cards of our
> congregation and there was a mound of these things. And so from the people who
> have gone through Financial Peace University, I forget what the figure is, it's over
> a million dollars worth of debt gone. But we've got millions of dollars more. I
> think we're making good progress, but it's just the tip of the iceberg. (Interview
> with Pastor Benjamin, August 2010)

Pastor Benjamin's depiction of mounds of cut up credit cards and over a million dollars

of debt alleviated is an encouraging start. However, as he says, there are still thousands of people

drowning in millions of dollars of debt in his congregation alone. But how has debt overtaken so

many individuals the church? What is this debt doing to the American culture, and more

specifically to those in the church? Pastor John addresses this question below.

> That's always a challenge. Our difficulty now and in the early 21st Century is that
> people became seduced by debt, and we believe that people really want to give. I
> believe that people are generous people. When there is a major disaster like Haiti
> or something happens with an earthquake or a fire, people respond, they get out
> their phone and text a number and give. So people want to give, but they are
> afraid to give, or [are] less able to give in their own minds because they are so
> upside down with debt. If we can help people to manage debt, to reduce debt, get
> out of debt, that money will flow because people are basically generous people.
> (Interview with Pastor John, June 2010)

As Pastor Benjamin suggests, Americans have been seduced by debt thereby creating bondage

and barriers that prevent them from being able to freely give their resources to those in need. As

Pastor John states, he feels that people are basically generous, but the bondage of debt has

reduced them to self-preservation based on inflated notions of personal "need," rather than generously giving to those in need.

Even though the pastors view their congregations as drowning in debt, many of the church organizations are in serious debt as well. This hinders them from not only giving to those in need but helping their own people too. Not only does debt deter giving for the members of the church, but it also reinforces the voice of the dominant culture that says it is reasonable to consume resources even without the funds to do so. Additionally, this trend within church organizations serves as an unfortunate example to congregation members and the community at large.

Many of the pastors seem to struggle with this tension between consuming while incurring debt and getting rid of debt to have more financial freedom. Pastor Jacob speaks of this cost-benefit struggle for church organizations when he states,

> So there are benefits (of a building) but right now we are $3 million in debt and we're giving the bank a whole lot of money, and we have to get rid of that. There are challenges that come with that too, you have to have a building to put people and yet with that comes a big price. (Interview with Pastor Jacob, June 2010)

He realizes that the debt for the building they meet in comes at a very steep price. Just like the individual that is struggling to get out of thousands of dollars of debt, many churches are struggling like this one to get out of millions of dollars of debt.

Many times the debt incurred by a church organization is not the choice of its current leaders. In the past it seems that many churches equated success to infrastructure expansion. That has put many in current church leadership in a position of debt reconciliation and financial hardship. Pastor Peter discussed this struggle as he told me a story of taking over a church that had millions of dollars in mortgage debt for a new building. He said,

I have pastored churches where the church was bankrupt when I got there. They built a building with 18% interest, and they owed more money 10 years after they built it than they paid for it originally because they could not pay for it, so I inherited that. I think that one has to rethink the priorities again. We tend to think success is a building and in budgets and lots of pastors and all those things. But I think that we're coming around with what is happening in America economically, that we have to rethink what are our priorities. (Interview with Pastor Peter, September 2010)

As he alludes, American pastors seem to be rethinking the concept of leveraging credit to build large buildings and incur debt. There seems to be a shift in the priorities of many of the pastors to stop building larger buildings for organizations and help the individuals they pastor to free themselves from a bondage of debt. Pastor Benjamin depicts this shift below.

We are modeling for them as a church, that we don't do anything unless we have the money for it. We did go into debt as an investment on this building. We have no other debt, and we're going to get out of this debt as soon as we can. Bottom line, the financial strategy of the church is, and churches have had this backward because the church usually says we're in debt, get us out of debt. The church should be saying, you're in debt, let's help you get out of debt. And then out of your giving, the church will get out of debt. That I think should be the strategy. (Interview with Pastor Benjamin, August 2010)

This is an encouraging statement from a prominent leader in the church organization that believes the church organizations have had debt reconciliation backwards. For a long time churches have been swept away by the current of debt, and they were trying to use members' donations to get out of their large amounts of debt. As Pastor Benjamin shows above, the church organizations seem to be making a philosophical shift. Instead of using the members to fix their debt problems first, their priority is refocusing on helping members with their debt and then worrying about their own financial issues. But until the larger current of American culture shifts away from consumerism and materialism, will the church organization ever get out of debt? If the members and visitors of a church organization constantly want to consume, the church must

provide something they can consume, thus, forcing them to continuously spend money they may

not have. This leads into the problem of the consumeristic and materialistic tendencies of church

members.

People in the Church are Consumers

The most prominent problem in the minds of interviewed pastors seems to be that church

members are consumers. They are not only consumers of materials offered by the dominant

culture, but they have become consumers of what the church has to offer. Because there are so

many different styles and types of churches now, Americans can find the type of church

organization that fits their consumptive preferences. If a church that a Christian is attending does

not offer the exciting music or dynamic teacher the church organization down the street offers,

then they will begin to "shop" for the kind of church and pastors they want.

This creates an internal tension within the church since the pastors and leaders of

churches are faced with the need to offer a product people want to consume. Essentially, the

church organization that can entertain individuals most effectively will be the church that the

masses of the church culture, so to speak, will consume. This creates a capitalist-style

competition between community churches: as they try to offer better services, music, preaching,

entertainment, and extracurricular events, churches hope to gain and maintain individuals'

attention and desire to consume what they are offering. Pastor Luke refers to how the church

produces religious consumers by competing for their attention when he says,

> I think churches are really good at producing consumers, and not really good at
> making disciples. And consumers don't make disciples. Only disciples make
> disciples. So I've come back from this summer with a rebirth of what I believe a
> disciple is about and how do we make disciples. I think that basically what we've

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made is a consumer. We've said, you show up, let us entertain you, you let us preach to you, you let us break down the Scripture, but we never call them to live it, to do it, it's just come let me teach you. And some are great churches, very conservative, Bible-believing churches. But there's just this in my heart, and my spirit, this burden, this passion to see people live what they believe. Not just know a verse from an expositional perspective. But they say I'm going to go do that. And I think that's when we make disciples. So I think for the American church is consumerism, which is definitely the twin sister of materialism. (Interview with Pastor Luke, August 2010)

He draws a very distinct line here between a consumer and a disciple. A consumer is someone that comes to a church service looking to either be entertained or given what they are seeking. A disciple, according to Pastor Luke, is someone that actually applies the teachings of the Bible to their lives and tries to live them out everyday. While consumption does not necessarily preclude applying Bible's teaching in one's life, in reality however consumption of religion often eclipses or replaces becoming a disciple. A consumer may ask the question "What can they offer me?" while a disciple may ask the question, "How does this change my life?" Essentially, while the church organization should be in the business of making disciples instead of making consumers, the pressure to satisfy the consumptive expectations of the followers is significant and challenging to the pastors.

This consumerism has even affected the pastors' roles, to the point where they have become somewhat of "religious jesters." Historically, jesters told jokes and entertained either the king, queen, or the masses of people watching their performances. If the jester did not perform well, he was subject to ridicule, punishment, and sometimes in extreme cases, depending on the temperament of the royalty, death. Just like a jester, it seems that a pastor today must entertain the masses in order to retain their attention, or he will watch the masses leave. Pastor Gabriel alludes to this in the picture below:

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I'd say that I think in America that consumerism is a big problem. I believe that we have lost biblical authority. We've lost the concept that I'm fine with you moving on somewhere else, but if you are here there is an authority that Jesus has put into place. I think in America we have a consumerism where the pastors are dancing and the people are buying. My personality doesn't go in that direction, part of that is vicious pride and arrogance, but on the other side of it, I just don't dance. I think consumerism is a big deal, but we're not getting jack shit done. I don't care what you say, and I think they are great pastors in this city, but they think that through one sermon a week life transformation is going to happen in their people, and that is not the case. (Interview with Pastor Gabriel, July 2010)

From the perspective of the pastors, the jester's only value is to entertain others and carries with it no significant and intrinsic value for the betterment of the people or community. This concern is reflected in Pastor Gabriel's strong language and disdain for metaphorically dancing to entertain the masses of church culture as a modern day jester. In his view, if all pastors are doing in the church today is entertaining the masses, then nothing is accomplished in the way of seeing lives changed for Christ, the betterment of community, and the fighting against injustices. According to *Amos 5:21-24*, these are essential elements of the lives of leaders in the church. Accordingly, these two pastors may argue that if the people in their congregations are only consumers and not becoming disciples and seeing lives transformed, then all they are doing is dancing for the applause of the crowd, and not leading others in the way Christ would desire.

The consumerism of the individuals in the church creates an interesting line on which pastors must balance. Pastors seem to want to lead individuals toward life transformation based on Christ's teachings rather than entertainment of people, thus, they reject the platform that is only used to humor and play to the desires of the masses. However, as the pastors discussed above, people want to be entertained, and if they are not, they will go elsewhere to find their entertainment. In American consumer culture, a pastor may not have the ability to lead individuals toward transformation in their lives unless he entertains them to some extent. If he

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does not entertain them, then they may leave, and he could loose the ability to influence people consistently.

This quickly becomes a double-edged sword for the pastors: in order to challenge individuals they must entertain them to keep their attention long enough to create an opportunity to challenge them. But in entertaining, the pastors are reinforcing the consumerism that influences the American culture and church culture. Since pastors want to influence the lives of people, this predicament may be the biggest struggle contemporary pastors face. Which one will give the pastors the platforms they need to achieve their Biblical goals? This is a question that is not easily answered and has become a source of philosophical and practical struggle for the pastors in this study, and likely poses similar challenges to Evangelical pastors elsewhere the United States.

Individualism Has Trumped Community

The concept and practice of deeply connected community is strongly emphasized in the *New Testament*, especially in the first century church as it is at its inception. In the book of *Acts* chapter two, the writer speaks of the small group of Christians meeting together daily in community and caring for all of these that had physical or spiritual need. From the beginning of the organization of the church in Jerusalem, involvement in community and interdependence upon one another was a vital element of the Christian life. The importance of community has not changed, and has been emphasized in anthropology. The study and theorization of communities is a major focus of anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner introduces the idea of *communitas* into

the realm of anthropology and claims there are two kinds of communal interaction and interrelatedness. He states:

> The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit to the general authority of the ritual elders (Tuner 1969:96).

Here Turner differentiates between class stratification and egalitarianism. The first society that he examines is one that focuses on separating individuals into classes, a type that reflects the American capitalistic society today. The second society is more of an egalitarian society that focuses on the "communion of equal individuals" that only submit to an authority that is earned through time spend living as an equal in a particular society. This type of society appears much closer to the concept of community in the *New Testament* church of the first century in terms of how they interacted with each other. Early church elders were not given this distinction because of a hierarchical system that gave power to those that had more resources. Instead, they were labeled elders because they adhered to beliefs and rituals and put the community's wellbeing above their own. Having a framework of community or *communitas*, both Biblically and anthropologically, is essential in understanding the findings in this section.

The final major problem that many of the pastors seem to be fighting against in the church culture is the extreme individualism to the detriment of community that the dominant culture promotes. Dominant American views, rooted mainly in capitalistic principles of individual attainment, include working hard to make one's own way in life, isolating oneself either individually or in a nuclear family structure, making one's own decisions, and striving for

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one's own goals and desires. Success for an American appears to be achieved when that an

individual no longer needs to rely on anyone else to survive and thrive. This can even be seen in

the suburban exodus whereby successful and prosperous individuals build or buy larger houses

farther away from people. These successful individuals begin to separate and isolate themselves

from the "common" people of the urban mix of classes and ethnicities. In fact, while the

American suburbanization was assumed to promote nuclear family togetherness, the social and

spatial structure of suburbia has been found to fuel isolation through a lack of public or

community spaces of interaction, in addition to undermining harmony within the family itself

(Miller 1995). According to the pastors this individualism and loss of community greatly hinders

the furthering and enriching of Christ's kingdom. Pastor Samuel explains below how the

individualism that comes largely from the American culture is entrenched in the spirituality of

individuals in the church:

> I think the culture of individualism tremendously hinders pastors as they try to
> introduce an interdependent community of people who have now converted to
> Christianity or to Christ where there culture has taught them an isolated
> individualistic society. Now you try to incorporate them into a totally new culture
> where they must learn to be a part of a whole. While they don't lose their
> individuality, as some would teach, they do have to learn that their individuality
> must submit to a whole and fit into a whole, and find a place of service and
> benefit and interdependence in the whole. I think that's the root of a lot of the
> problems. It comes from a spiritual issue, and it's an entrenched selfishness. I
> think that comes largely from our culture. (Interview with Pastor Samuel, August
> 2010)

Pastor Isaiah reiterates the hindrances of individualism for the church organization when he says,

> I think that we are an incredibly narcissistic and egocentric society, and I think
> that the Western church in America has such a truncated view of the Gospel, and
> it's so much about us. If you walk in the front door here and look up, you'll see
> our motto on the wall which is "For Christ and His kingdom, It's not about us." I
> think that we need to be continually reminded in a culture that just saturates us

with the message that it is all about us, but that's really not the case. (Interview
with Pastor Isaiah, August 2010)

This lack of human and social interdependence is antithetical to the way the church is Biblically

designed to operate. In fact, in *Romans 12:3-13* Apostle Paul describes how the church

functioned as one body with one purpose, not as individual parts:

> Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this
> warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your
> evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just
> as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with
> Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In
> his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God
> has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has
> given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher,
> teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give
> generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility
> seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.
> Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold
> tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight
> in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord
> enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on
> praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager
> to practice hospitality. (Apostle Paul, In: Romans 12:3-13, New Living
> Translation)

The Apostle Paul warns the individuals of the *New Testament* church in Rome not to

think of him or herself too highly and as separate from the rest of the Christians. The gifts,

talents, and value they bring to the church are no more important than anyone else's and they

cannot function properly alone. This ideal of individuals belonging to one another and

functioning in one community is a nearly a foreign concept to many contemporary Americans.

Many people believe the church organization is there to cater to the desires of the individuals,

rather than the individual gifting being available for the betterment of the church body as a

whole. As one can see, the American ideal of individualism is in drastic contrast to the Biblical

ideal of the church being one interdependent body or community that aims to have every

member working together to function properly.

Pastor Gabriel holds a strong opinion on the detriment of individualism that is so

prevalent in the American and church culture. He seems to believe that in the capitalist market-

driven culture, it is difficult for a pastor to teach clear Biblical principles of communal living, or

as Victor Turner phrases it *communitas,* because he might be labeled a Marxist. Marxism,

communism, and socialism carry negative connotations in American mainstream culture and

politics, primarily as a legacy of the cold war. Once one is labeled a Marxist or a communist, he

or she is typically written off and disregarded as a radical, without much consideration given to

the possible merits of the actual views of the individual. This is especially true in the church

culture where most of its members strive toward the Protestant work ethic as a way of life. Pastor

Gabriel refers to this battle when he says,

> I think that if we go back to something that is a disadvantage to American
> churches, it's the individualism of the American church. If you say anything that I
> think is Biblical, then you are going to be accused of being a communist. Actually
> I think if you get close to what is Biblical economics, you will sound so Marxist
> that you will not be listened to. (Interview with Pastor Gabriel, July 2010)

Pastor Gabriel goes further with this analysis by equating individualism to "spiritual

pornography" when he states,

> I think there is also a spiritual pornography in the American church, where you're
> not responsible for me, I'm responsible for myself, and I'll tell you how much
> spiritual authority you have in my life, and I'll tell you how much of myself I'm
> going to give you. And so instead of the biblical idea where the pastor is at the
> bottom supporting people but directly connected to them, and whatever authority
> we have is not lording it over them but humbly serving them, the real power lies
> in the member and that's scary. And I don't mean that it is scary because I want
> everyone to follow me and do what I tell them to do, but I know how dumb I am
> and I know how reckless it would be for me not to have elders in my life who can
> tell me what to do. I know how reckless for me it would be not to have a 60

something-year-old counselor that I go to who has sway in my life. I have three elders in my life that they can tell me what to do and I do it, and that gives me great freedom to actually lead the people of this church well. If you get away from American culture and go to India or China or some other culture where the Gospel is going crazy, they have a much clearer authority structure, where the authority loves their sheep. And they lay their life down for them and they're like Jesus, they're here for you that they're going to lead you. So I think we've missed that, because no one tells anyone what to do in America and that's sad because we've been built for that as people and we really thrive in that. (Interview with Pastor Gabriel, July 2010)

His understanding of individualism as "spiritual pornography" is expressed in a very strong language that paints a vivid picture of the control that Americans strive for in life. The person consuming the pornography is in complete control and responsible for what kind, how much, and to what extent they view and interact with the pornography. If the person does not like a particular pornography they can look for another avenue that may satisfy their needs and wants. If they feel they have consumed too much they can turn off the video or website any time they want. At no time in the process of viewing pornography do those on the picture, video, or website have the authority to tell the participant to stop or that they have consumed too much. In essence, pornography gives individuals the ability to satisfy their carnal urges without ever having to interact with or answer to anyone else about why they are doing what they are doing.

This may be the spiritual pornography that Pastor Gabriel is speaking of in the church culture. As I depicted earlier, the pastors have become somewhat of a jester to satisfy the desires of the masses. According to Gabriel, church members seem to want to remain autonomous in the crowd, or behind the screen, and watch what the pastors or church have to offer them. Just like a person skipping from website to website trying to find satisfaction in pornography, those that are consumed with retaining their individualism in the church culture are engaging in spiritual pornography of looking for consumption of images and words that suit the particular individual

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desires. They can keep their distance from the pastors on the stage and the body of Christ as they look to be satisfied. At no time is the individualistic person part of a body as *Romans* says. According to Pastor Gabriel, and it seems logical, this extreme individualism fosters a society on stratification that was discussed at the beginning of this section. This stratification of individuals is a major detriment to the church organization in America working together as one body that Christ appears to want the church to function as. The body, or the church community, cannot function properly if parts, or individuals, separate themselves from the body because they think their function is more important. If this is true, individualism and stratification may be the most dangerous influence that capitalistic culture has had on the church culture in America.

Hegemony of Dominant Culture Has Led to a Culture of Prosperity in the Church

The pastors' discourse on the challenges and dilemmas facing the church culture communicated the problems stem from the debt, consumerism, materialism, and individualism that is perpetuated by the dominant culture. This *culture of prosperity* that dominates American capitalist culture has now also become hegemonic within the church culture. Yet, the hegemony of the drive to acquisition in the church culture is simultaneously antithetical to the Biblical mandates for how a church organization is supposed to function. Because there have been generations that have subscribed to the dominant culture's positive view of capitalism, and even equated capitalism to God's desire, these ideals are now engrained in the church culture. Pastor Elijah depicts the influence of this hegemony on the dominant church culture when he says,

> We end up having this kind of demanding spirit, a spirit of entitlement before
> God, that if we keep our nose clean and obey God and do what he tells us, that
> he's kind of obligated to bless our lives, and when that doesn't happen we
> sometimes throw spiritual temper tantrums. This is what one of my favorite

authors says, and I think I can quote it, he says "it seems in the American church we have made it our highest goal to make life pleasant enough that people find it easy to worship God" and that's not an exact quote but it's pretty close. And so I think we've lost the importance, nobility, and the holiness of suffering. We've made it our goal in the American church to grow our churches bigger numerically, the actual church facilities, but the target, but I believe that God has is the target of being like Christ and that's the target. The Bible says that Jesus learned obedience through suffering, but it's like we want to do everything that we can to avoid suffering. We have reduced God to a useful God, that if we do things right, our goal is to be blessed by God. It's not to grow to know him. It's not to grow to be like him. It's not to grow to have us conformed to the image of Christ. It's for our lives to go well. (Interview with Pastor Elijah, June 2010)

Pastor Isaiah, along with several other pastors, understands *the culture of prosperity* is

problem that pastors have to recognize and resist. These pastors believe they need to continually

fight against the cultural hegemony of prosperity that plagues church culture. In every aspect of

the church, pastors have to battle against materialism, consumerism, and individualism. This is

not a surprise since the church culture is made up of individuals in the dominant class of white

suburban upper-middle class individuals. Isaiah states,

> If you look at Jesus's teachings and try to align them up with the materialistic, consumeristic, egocentric society we live in, it's really difficult to do so, especially in a suburban middle-upper class kind of environment. I think that you're continually fighting in that. Especially because there are those that have big pulpits in our country that will really promote a feel good, health, wealth, and Prosperity Gospel, which I think might just be the greatest evil of our society. Unfortunately often times we're feeding our folks cotton candy and wonder why their teeth are rotting away and their souls are withering up. (Interview with Pastor Isaiah, August 2010)

Is the hegemonic primacy of materialism and the church's embrace of these trends the greatest

evil of American society, as Pastor Isaiah states? It may not be the greatest evil of the American

society as a whole, but it may in fact be decisive in undermining the effectiveness of the church

in American culture. The issue now is whether the church organization will collapse under the

weight of the capitalist expectations of the society, or will it break away from this hegemony and

adhere to Christ's teachings?

Hegemony of American Capitalistic Culture Leads to Less Faithful and Effective Churches

According to the interviewed pastors, the major consequence of the hegemony of

American capitalist ideals over the church organization seems to be its impact on the faithfulness

and effectiveness of churches. If debt, materialism, consumerism, and individualism were

marginal concerns for how the church organization operated, then these issues would be unlikely

preoccupations in the interviewed pastors' minds. However, this is not the case because the

cultural materialist hegemony has significantly changed the direction of the organization in

society today. Pastors may tell members they should not adhere to these influences, but the

American church culture is so steeped with the same capitalist ideals that it is increasingly hard

for the church members to separate these ideals from the Bible. Pastor Jeremiah gives a good

example of how this cultural hegemony has been passed down through the generations until

today. He states,

> I think some of it has to do with generational sin that gets passed down. If you
> saw your dad, and his vice was wanting more power or more prestige or more
> esteem or more stuff for more security. And that's what you grew up with your
> whole life, and then you got some minister that says it's not about that. But your
> dad always went to church, and in fact he was treated even better than most
> people at church, and you put two and two together and figure out, ah- that's why
> he was treated better here. It is tough for you to even try to figure out if you really
> believe the pastor, or what it looks like for you to live a different way than your
> father. I think the only thing that I can do is preach contentment and help people
> recognize that comparison is contentment's enemy. (Interview with Pastor
> Jeremiah, July 2010)

Pastor Jeremiah's depiction of the struggle of a young man in the church trying to figure out what is true between Biblical teaching of a pastor and the influence of the hegemonic culture is significant. The father's influence in the church was bestowed on him because of his adherence to the dominant culture of American capitalism, and it seems the church glorified that attitude. It then makes it difficult for younger generations to reconcile a pastor's teachings about the difference between the dominant culture and the church's ideals, because they seem to look exactly the same. In summarizing the issue that Pastor Jeremiah raises, Pastor Michael has a useful analysis of why the cultural hegemony of American capitalistic society has diminished the effectiveness and unfaithfulness of American churches. He states,

> Here's the problem with the church. The world looks at us and says, why should we convert to the Savior that you worship on Sunday morning when we have already converted to all the saviors that you worship the other six days of the week? There are a lot of books that say that the world looks at us and says you guys are hypocrites. But that's our issue, and that is what we contend against year in and year out. And it is the biggest hindrance to the mission of the Gospel for the local church. (Interview with Pastor Michael, September 2010)

The "saviors" worshiped the other six days of the week in this narrative signify the worship of debt, consumerism, materialism, and individualism by Christians. These "saviors" that church members rely on are the same elements of capitalism that people outside of the church look to for their security and hope. Therefore, as Pastor Michael observes, why would those outside of the church want to change the way they live their lives in dominant American culture? The lives of those in the church culture look just like the lives of those that adhere to the ideals of the capitalist culture. The individuals that are in the church are just as loaded with debt, consumerism, materialism, and individualism as those that have never in their lives set foot in a church building.

Those outside of the church appear to see nothing different than their own reflection in the lives of those inside the church. If there is nothing appealing or different in the lives of those in the church, then there is nothing the church can ask people outside of the church to change in their own lives. Because the church culture is so aligned with the cultural hegemony of American capitalism, those outside of the church have theoretically already achieved adherence to church norms. As Pastor Michael ponders, why would anyone outside of the church want to convert to a different God, or Savior, on Sundays when they already worship all the same gods the rest of the week? In effect, there is nothing to convert those outside the church, because they have already converted to the hegemony of the dominant American capitalistic culture that those in the church culture have replaced the Gospel.

Discussion: Has Capitalism Simply Become Habit For the Church?

Has the church as a whole, both members and the organizations, simply adhered to the materialist hegemony out of habit or the adoption of unquestioned cultural norms, or is it an open, conscious choice by individuals in the church? As Pastors Jeremiah and Michael conveyed in the previous section, much of this adherence appears to stem from habit and unquestioned embrace of dominant views. The ubiquitous nature of capitalist assumptions it becomes far more challenging to contest the social currents of debt, consumerism, materialism, and individualism, then to simply submit to them. The majority of Americans have been swept away by these currents they have learned as cultural norms from their upbringing in this society. It is useful to contextualize this dynamic using Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the influence of proofs and

habit on an individual's beliefs from an excerpt in his book *The Logic of Practice* (1990). In this

discussion he argues,

> For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as
> mind. As a result, demonstration is not the only instrument for convincing us.
> How few things can be demonstrated! Proofs only convince the mind; habit
> provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the
> automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it. Who ever proved
> that it will dawn tomorrow, and that we shall die? And what is more widely
> believed? It is, then, habit that convinces us and makes so many Christians. It is
> habit that makes Turks, heathen, soldiers, etc. … In short, we must resort to habit
> once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves
> in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the
> proofs always present before us. We must acquire an easier belief, which is that of
> habit. With no violence, art or argument it makes us believe things, and so
> inclines all our faculties to this belief that our soul falls naturally into. When we
> believe only by the strength of our conviction and the automaton is inclined to
> believe the opposite, that is not enough. We must therefore make both parts of us
> believe: the mind by reasons, which need to be seen only once in a lifetime, and
> the automaton by habit, and not allowing it any inclination to the contrary'
> (Bourdieu 1990:48-49).

Bourdieu argues that individuals tend not to take the time to find proofs behind every belief they

have in life. They have to find an easier belief, which becomes habit. The mind must have proof

of an idea in order to believe it, but after an individual has embraced a particular idea, he or she

maintains the belief by simply forming a habit. The habit then takes over, reconfirming the belief

and proof without ever questioning whether or not there is anything contrary to that habit.

This is a crucial concept when evaluating the hegemony of American capitalism.

Individuals in church culture have inadvertently perpetuated the materialist mindset by both

proving and believing, somewhere along the way, that this cultural hegemony of the dominant

ideals is the exemplary way to live life. After they have embraced these views (have been proved

in their minds), habit takes over, and it is then assumed thereafter that this belief is true. The

habit of living by the dominant American capitalistic ideals becomes the norm and is never

questioned in the church culture; it would be too difficult for individuals to constantly try to prove this way of life is right and true, when many struggles in their own lives (debt, financial entrapment, etc) suggest to the contrary. Yet, a habit, as Bourdieu argues, has the power to sustain a set of potentially destructive norms and ideas. It seems as though the church members have made the ideals of the dominant American capitalistic culture a habit. Many of the individuals in the church never question whether these materialist ideals are antithetical to the teachings of Christ they read in the Bible and claim to stake their lives on.

Living the American Dream of capitalism, both within and without the church, distracts individuals from questioning whether or not there is a different way to live. As Pastor Gabriel asserted, if one teaches anything close to Biblical, then that pastor might be labeled a Marxist, therefore the dichotomization so prevalent in American society into capitalist and its historical opposite, communist ideals, hinders pastors and worshipers alike. The habit, and underlying belief behind it, is that capitalism is Godly, and one should not look for another way to live. As soon as one challenges that habit, one is written off as a radical and standing against the American Dream which is equated to Godliness. Essentially, if an individual speaks out against the habit of the American Dream or questions its truth, then in effect he or she is also speaking out against God's desire for Americans. While this is not the truth of the teaching of Christ in the Bible, the American Dream seems to have replaced Christ's teachings. This is a dangerous habit and a slippery slope for church culture, since the very ideals that members are adhering to is also the same ideal that is rendering their faith largely ineffective in American culture.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This research study shows that although the pastors in this study come from diverse backgrounds and circumstances their subjectivities—including particular understandings of their role and direction of their churches as well as experiences within their congregations—nevertheless reflect a dominant perspective on Christian ideas that are interpreted within capitalistic understanding of success mixed with a desire for faithfulness to God. The emphasis on numeric growth is a good example for this mixture of influences and interpretations. Pastors often times want their congregations to grow because numeric growth is a good sign of being successful within a capitalistic understanding. Conversely, these pastors' desire to remain faithful to God leads to desiring numeric growth in their congregations in the number of souls converted to believing in Christ. They have been influenced by both the spiritual teachings of the church culture and the dominant ideals of capitalistic American culture.

I believe that individuals are social beings, and they are a product of the cultural setting in which they are raised. With this said, the social forces prevalent in a society will greatly influence who that person becomes and what ideals he or she holds. Although American culture is profoundly diverse, most individuals form cultural ideals that are built upon the foundations of capitalism as the dominant system of thought in the United States. It is presumed that if an individual within a capitalistic culture works hard and couples that hard work with ingenuity and innovation, the underlying belief is that he or she will gain some sort of capital and thus be successful, despite the fact that structural barriers related to race, class, and gender influence one's ability to achieve such success. The church culture, being developed within and formed alongside capitalistic ideals, is not separated from these underlying beliefs. Based on these

assumptions, it can be inferred that ideas about Godliness, successfulness, and proper Christian behaviors within church culture would be shaped by the forces of American capitalistic ideals.

While the pastors have differing views on what the roles and obligations of a pastor should be, they are formed by the cultural constructions, which they have experienced throughout their lives. Different pastors from various denominational, theoretical, and personal backgrounds had similar understandings of what a pastor should do and how they should act as the leader of a congregation of people. Although these perspectives between pastors differ slightly, they have all been shaped within the constraints of American Christian ideals along with their spiritual belief in Christ. A pastor raised in America will find it extremely difficult to view his role outside of these two contexts. From these forces, consistent trends emerge from what these pastors believe their roles as spiritual leaders of a congregation should be.

I began the finding of the thesis by drawing a picture of my interactions with a select group of pastors in order to offer descriptions of pastors' demeanor and their surroundings where they work, as well as their attitudes toward this research project. If the reader simply looks at the pastors as one large conglomerate of church leaders, he or she will miss out on the personal intricacies of the individual pastors. While all of these men believe in the same God, they do not have the same personalities, strengths, or even passions. To clump every pastor into one category without understanding them on an individual level would greatly hinder the ability to understand the subjectivities in which each pastor operates.

Overall he pastors' interviews revealed the way in which both Biblical mandates and American capitalistic ideals greatly influence how they define success for themselves, those involved in their congregations, as well as their organizations. Their central definitions of

success revolved around the ideas of faithfulness to God and numeric growth of their congregation. At first these two definitions of success seem to be in stark contrast to one another, and they do oppose each other in some instances. However, in other examples they are mutually inclusive since many pastors believe faithfulness leads to numeric growth, thereby both notions are understood as reinforcing each other.

Faithfulness can be defined as being obedient to do what God has "called" and "wired" an individual to do, no matter the outcome. This definition of success was particularly evident in the way that pastors affirmed my father's faithfulness, and thus success, in pastoring a small country church of 30 people for 15 years that never grew in size. He simply did what he thought was obedient to God, and this faithfulness is successful in the eyes of many of the pastors I interviewed. However, other pastors believed that numeric size was a good indication of success. Some of the pastors argued that "healthy things grow" and that a healthy church that is being faithful will grow in numbers of converts and members. This dualistic understanding of success is a debated one in church culture and leads to strong lines of belief between different theologies. However, all of the pastors agreed that that just because a church organization is large that does not mean it is successful. Likewise, just because another fellowship is small, the unimpressive stature does not equate to failure. This brings the definition back in full circle showing that faithfulness to Christ is the ultimate measure of success and numeric size is simply one possible indicator of faithfulness.

My study also revealed that the increasing problems of debt, consumerism, and individualism in church culture and in church organizations appear to stem from the dominant American capitalistic culture that permeates through the church culture. These economic currents

are having two major impacts on the church. First, the pastors observed that church members are saturated with these elements and are therefore restricted from experiencing the advantages that interacting with the church should bring because these currents appear to overpower Biblical and pastoral teachings. Members are not able to give their time, resources, and effort as much as they would like to church organizations because of debt and consumerism, and they are separated from deep community because of the increasing individualism in church culture. Living in debt, consumerism, and individualism are antithetical to the teachings of the Bible and thus living according to capitalistic ideals hinders church members culture from living the way Christ intends for believers to live.

Secondly, pastors' narratives show that these influences of debt, consumerism, and individualism are having a negative impact on the church organization as a whole. Because individuals inside their congregations are consumed with debt, they are unable to help the church get out of debt and vice versa. The consumerism of individuals and the church organizations has led to members being very fluid in their involvement in a church community as many worshipers stay at a given church only as long as their personal desires for the kind of entertainment and language suits them. The church on the other hand is likely to cater to these different desires of worshipers and therefore has created a sense of competition for retaining members between churches. This competition goes against the Biblical ideals of growing the kingdom of God in Christian converts. Instead, it makes the pastors fight to build and maintain their own congregations in order to keep the doors open to do what they feel God has called them to do. Finally, the individualism adhered to by so many in American society, and now the church culture, has reduced much of the authority that a pastor used to carry, therefore reinforcing an

attitude that faith is consumable and that consumer (in this case the worshiper) "knows best." If a

pastor does not have the ability to speak into the lives of those in his congregation, he will never

be able to help them understand spiritual disciplines within their faith. As these problems

continue to increase in church culture, it becomes incredibly hard for pastors and individuals to

live out the Biblical ideals of their faith. The more an individual's Christian faith is infected with

these elements of the dominant American capitalistic culture, the less their lives align with what

Christ wants for those that claim to follow his teachings.

Contributions to Anthropology

The church culture is an extremely influential social force. This social force has the

ability to shape the ways of thinking and ideals of millions of people. It is not only a force within

American culture, but also its influence spreads across many areas of the world, and thus

understanding its ideals and teachings deserve strong consideration. It is important to begin to

gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which leaders, specifically pastors, in

the church organization construct their ideology and teaching.

Anthropology is used in large part to understand how people construct and arrange

beliefs and actions in their lives. This field establishes a useful stage from which to begin to

understand the spiritual and social forces that impact church culture from an anthropological

perspective. Most anthropological studies of the church culture thus far are from an outsider's, or

etic, perspective that miss out on the spiritual belief systems the pastors are operating from. The

church culture is often looked at with skepticism from anthropologists, as John Barker (2008)

and Joel Robbins (2006 & 2007) suggest in this introduction, when it comes to the spiritual

beliefs of pastors. They frequently explain away pastors' deep spiritual beliefs by equating them to cultural influences and shaping. Anthropologists have also not spent extended amounts of time and worked in the church culture for years and do not understand the constant spiritual conversations within church culture. These extended amounts of time and experience coupled with my emic perceptive within this culture are my greatest offering to this study.

As a pastor I have been able to look at these men and the church culture from both an insider and outsider perspective. First of all I have the same spiritual beliefs as the pastors, and I try to mold my life around those beliefs just as they do. When the pastors speak of their desire to be faithful to God alone, I not only hear what they are saying, but I feel what they are saying as well. I know what it feels like to have everything within my spirit long to have my life be pleasing to the God I follow. On the other hand, as an anthropologist, I have tried to separate myself from the culture of Christianity and examine the subjective perspectives and experiences of the pastors in this study as well as contextualize these narratives using anthropological theories. As Bahria Sherif says in the article *The Ambiguity of Boundaries in the Fieldwork Experience: Establishing Rapport and Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status* (2001), this inside/outsider perspective can be very advantageous for a fieldwork project. The mixture of these two perspectives has given me the ability to walk the line between belief and skepticism, and to offer in this study a deeper understanding of the pastors and their church culture.

While the culture in which these men have grown up shapes much of who they are, it is ultimately their faith in Christ that shapes everything they try to emphasize in their lives and teachings. Let us consider Pastor Jeremiah and Pastor James for instance. One was raised in a mega-church and has never wanted to do anything else with his life other than pastor a church.

The other was a man that never thought about church or Christ as he pursued a life of success in the corporate world of sales. After a life-changing spiritual experience, James gave up his career to become a pastor. Both of these men preach the same Biblical ideals and live to please the same God. If one were to look only at the superficial cultural influences of their backgrounds, then it would seem unlikely that both men should have become pastors. I look in this study at both the cultural influences and the deeply rooted spiritual beliefs of these drastically different pastors. The comprehension that there is an intertwining of these two powerful forces into the fabric of pastors' lives is of utmost importance. One cannot have this understanding unless he or she completely understands the belief structure by which the pastors operate. My anthropological theoretical background together with my spiritual beliefs gave me the tools to examine this belief system and pastors' experiences from a unique perspective that honors pastors' subjectivities but contextualizes them using broader social science theories.

Broader Contributions

This research contributes to other academic areas besides anthropology, and it can benefit the church culture and the pastors involved in it as well. This study can make a contribution in the field of other social sciences, and in particular religious studies which aims to understand religious perspectives and behaviors from both individual and institutions angle. Understanding the subjectivities of pastors inside the church organization could therefore add to the overall understanding of the Evangelical culture as a whole. Understanding what the pastors teach about economic issues as it pertains to capitalism could give the area of religious studies a deeper understanding of social forces in the church that both underpin what pastors do and say, but also

what the worshipers hear and are socialized within the church to believe. This study could also be valuable in other academic areas such as sociology where Evangelical church is one of the more powerful social forces plays an important role in shaping both individual perspectives and political attitudes.

This study could also be used in the area of furthering the education of pastors on the structural influences that lead to increased acceptance of capitalism as a norm within the church organization. The more that pastors understand the structural and social forces that impact the individuals in their congregations, the better they will be able to express and lead those in their faith to a deeper belief. Until pastors grasp the social forces that impact societies they will not be able to influence the people involved in their churches. Although this contribution is outside the academic realm, it would benefit pastors in church culture by helping them consider the perspectives of other pastors in their church community when described from an anthropological and academic standpoint.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of areas were neglected in this study that would be interesting topics to consider for future research. Since I was limited in time, and given the fact that I am a pastor and work on Sundays at my church organization, I was unable to go and listen to all of these pastors teach at a Sunday morning service. Being able to go to each church organization a couple of times and listen to the pastors teach and preach would give a greater understanding of what they emphasized through their teaching platform and the way the perspectives they revealed in this study manifest themselves in their pastoring. This would also help to examine whether or not

what the pastors said in their interviews was congruent or not with what they communicate to their congregations on a weekly basis.

Also, instead of limiting this research to 20 pastors in the Greater Orlando area, it would be beneficial to interview other American church leaders and pastors throughout the country. Conducting interviews with pastors in different areas of the country would give a broader understanding of the diversity of subjectivities of pastors throughout American culture. Speaking with pastors from different areas would also limit any bias that is found among pastors in the Orlando, Florida area and give a more holistic understanding of pastoral constructs of the issues at hand.

Along the same line as interviewing pastors in different areas of the country, it would be imperative to interview pastors from different backgrounds, such as minority pastors and women pastors. Limiting the sample to mainstream white middle class male pastors was helpful in building a deeper understanding of a specific sub-sect of American church culture, but it does not give a holistic comprehension. While the mainstream white middle class male pastors are currently the dominant voice in much of American church culture, they are not the voice that speaks for all of American church communities and faithful. Having a better understanding of the subjectivities and experiences of all of the sub-sects found in American church culture would be of utmost value in deepening our understanding of the issues examined in this study.

Finally, understanding what members in American church culture know and believe is vital to truly understand the topics introduced. Do the individuals in American church culture have the same understandings and beliefs as the pastors? If they do not, why are their understandings and beliefs different? Being able to speak with numerous individual members

from different areas in American church culture could answer three questions. The questions are: 1) What is the overall pattern in the members' beliefs toward the dominant hegemonic ideals of American capitalism? 2) Are they learning these beliefs from the dominant culture alone or are the pastors teaching these ideals as well? 3) Which voice is more dominant in American church culture, that of Christ's teachings in the Bible or American capitalistic ideals?

Continued research in this area is crucial for understanding the mindsets of many Americans. As the world becomes smaller through continued globalization, the dominant American voices continue to broaden influence on the global stage. In particular, Evangelical Christianity has been growing in its influence cross-culturally through missionary efforts, often led by Western pastors. Contemplating and studying the voices and perspectives of those that shape the minds and cultural constructs of so many leaders on the world stage is of paramount importance. For this reason, considering the subjectivities of pastors in the church organization could be significant in grasping the direction of current and future cultural social phenomena, not only in church culture, but also throughout societies.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Joanna Zofia Mishtal** and Co-PI: **Michael E. Anderson**

Date: **May 13, 2010**

Dear Researcher:

On 5/13/2010, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Economic Trends and Spiritual Training in the Mainstream Emerging Evangelical Church.
Investigator:	Joanna Zofia Mishtal
IRB Number:	SBE-10-06918
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/13/2010 08:34:10 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

<u>Interview Questions</u>

I.   Life History

1. How long have you been a pastor?
2. When did you know that you were "called" into the ministry? How?
3. What type of church fellowship did you start out at? (Small, medium, large)
4. Did you get your seminary degree? From where and when?
5. What do you feel is the best thing about your current position in the church that you are working with?
6. What do you feel that the role of a pastor in the church should be?
7. What responsibilities and obligations do you feel you have to the people?
8. What responsibilities and obligations do you feel you have to Jesus?
   Megachurch Pastors
1. Would you ever go back to a smaller church? Why? Or if not, why not?
2. Does a small Church organization have an equal chance to be successful in the building of God's Kingdom compared to a large church organization? Why or why not?

II.   Economic Trends

1. Are there problems that you see with the church as a whole in today's American culture? If so, specify.
2. What do you see as a successful church organization?
   a. Can you give me an existing example?
   b. Why do you think they are successful?
3. How do you define success for an entire church organization?
4. Does having larger fellowships help in the living out of a congregation's faith? If so, how?
5. Is it desirable to grow to be a large church? Why?
6. What is your opinion of the relationship between the Church organization and wealth?
   a. What should be done with that wealth?
   b. Why?
   Explain Culture of Prosperity
7. Do you feel that there is a culture of prosperity in the American church culture today? How so?
   a. How is this being seen and what impact is it having on the popular culture at large?
   b. How is it being seen in church culture as well?
   c. Where does this trend come from?

III.   Spiritual Training

1. How is the wealth of a church justified when Jesus says things like "sell everything we have and give to the poor to follow him and it is incredible hard for a rich man to enter heaven"?
2. How and where, or if at all, does scripture suggests that building large organizations and accumulating wealth is helpful in kingdom pursuits?
3. What do you think that Jesus would say about the current state of your church and how it reaches out to the poor, overlooked, and marginalized of the world today?
4. What does Jesus define as an economic strategy for living as a Christ follower?
   a. How is the Church organization in general living this out today?
   b. How do you feel that your church congregation is living this out today?

IV.   Reconciling Economic Trends and Spiritual Training

1. How much of the money taken in by your fellowship goes to the poor and the community?
   a. What specific organizations and types of areas is your fellowship contributing to? Both locally and globally?
2. What is the percentage of money taken by your fellowship that is used for operating costs?
   a. What percentage is given to the poor and other philanthropic organizations?
   b. Why are these percentages this way?
3. Are you satisfied with the percentage that is going out to the community?
   a. Should it be a lesser percentage?
   b. Should it be greater percentage?
   c. If it should be greater, is there anything stopping you from giving a greater percentage now?
4. If faith is the main goal, why is so much effort put into growth of the church?

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