



## Chapter 1

# The Emerging Glocal Context



*“I remember being broken by the fact that there weren’t too many churches reaching the next generation who were both post-modern and multi-ethnic in flavor. As a kid, my best friends were African-American or Caucasian. I had wondered why churches were so segregated. Furthermore, I saw how most of the churches I knew weren’t connecting with my friends. Church seemed so irrelevant and boring to them.”*

David Gibbons, Newsong Church



BREAKING THE CODE REQUIRES A belief that there is a code to be broken. Breaking the code means that we have to recognize that there are cultural barriers (in addition to spiritual ones) that blind people from understanding the gospel. Our task is to find the right way to break through those cultural barriers while addressing the spiritual and theological ones as well.

That is what missionaries have always done. Today is no different. North America is a missions context, not because people are less Christian than they once were (although that is true), but because





God “sent” us to North America. It is a mission field because God sent us here as missionaries.

However, we are missing a clear reality if we do not recognize that this is a harder mission field than it once was. Historically, the Christian church was the first choice of spiritually minded North Americans—today, it often does not make the top ten list. Years ago, when people looked for spiritual answers, they looked to the church. Now, many look to anybody and anything but us.

Breaking the code is the recognition that there are visible and invisible characteristics within a community that will make its people resistant to or responsive to the church and its gospel message. Discerning Christians discover those relevant issues and break through the resistance—so that the name and reality of Jesus Christ can be more widely known.

One of the biggest cultural barriers we face is the emerging “glocal” context. We use this term to refer to the convergence of the **global** reality with our **local** reality. North America has become a “**glocal** community” requiring new strategies for effective ministry.

When the church was the first choice of spiritual seekers, we just needed to be there. They knew we were here. Most people had friends who attended. All they needed to do was come . . . and they did.

Now, we need more proactive strategies. We need to go to the people. Maybe we have lost ground because we have been thinking that they should just come to us. Now, we need methods and models that address the changing glocal context that is North America. People no longer think just locally; they think glocally.

First, it is important to understand the situation in which we find ourselves. A church that is a good example of living among cultural change is in Miami near Calle Ocho (Eighth Street), the center of what is now the Latino community. Calle Ocho was not always the center of Little Havana. At one time, it was part of the culture that existed in Miami before the Cuban influx.

Then, Batista fell and Castro came to power. One million Cubans moved into the neighborhood and, suddenly, that little church was no longer part of its community; it was a colony in the midst of





## BREAKING THE MISSIONAL CODE

another culture. It had to decide to change and reach its new neighbors or die. Like most churches, it chose to keep its culture and lose its community.

Today, the church in North America is in a similar situation. The culture has shifted. While this cultural shift has been more subtle and gradual than the one that took place in Miami, the cultural landscape has definitely changed. Lots of people throw terms around to describe the shift. The term that receives the most attention is “postmodernism.” However, since postmodernism is an art form, a literary category, an academic discipline, and even a cultural force, even that fails to describe the situation. But, for the purpose of writing this book, we will use the term *postmodernism* to refer to the cultural shift that has taken place in our society. Many are now running from the term *postmodernism*. Since some have expressed concern about the influence of postmodernism in the emerging church, all books and topics that reference the word have to be hidden away! Yet until a new term arrives, we simply recognize that the world has changed and that we live in a world that has transitioned from the modern era to one that is “post.”

Basically, postmodernity is the rejection of the modern view of life and the embracing of something new. It is not about GenXers (only pastors and marketers use that word now). For that matter, it is not really about postmodernism because while much of the culture has changed, it has not changed everywhere. This chart from *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* will help illustrate the change in the broader culture from modernism to postmodernism and how it relates to the church.

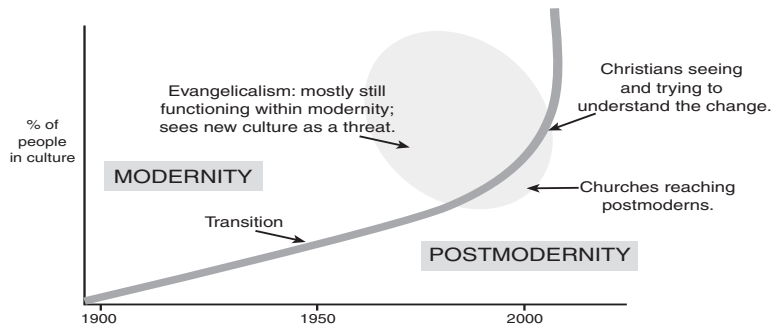
The issue is that you have to decide where you are living. Are you in a community firmly entrenched in the worldview of modernity? If you seek to lead your church to reach postmoderns, you will first need to convert people to postmodernism and then to Christ. Is that really our mission?

Maybe you are in an area of the continent that is more comfortable with traditional approaches and churches. Great! Become





## THE EMERGING GLOCAL CONTEXT



missional in that context, not a trendy community somewhere far away. For too many, they love their preferences and their strategies more than they love the people whom God has called them to reach.

We are sent as God's missionary.<sup>1</sup> The only question is where. "Just as God is a missionary God, so the church is to be a missionary church."<sup>2</sup> Jesus taught that "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Our purpose, therefore, is to go to this new expression of life, culture, and values and to "face a fundamental challenge. That challenge is to learn to think about [our] culture in missional terms."<sup>3</sup>

Evangelicals have struggled with responding to these new realities, finding reasons not to respond. *It is important to note that the shift to postmodernism has not happened everywhere—it has not yet impacted many in the **church culture*** because the church culture acts as a protective shield, unmolested by a secular culture's music, literature, and values.

In large pockets of North America people still live each day in much the same manner as their parents before them. These people have more toys, but they still go to church (or at least feel guilty if they do not go), still have relatively stable family lives, and still espouse the "old values" of America. Most evangelicals live in these modern "pockets" of culture and have been somewhat insulated from the societal changes. Still, even though the societal shift has not yet





## BREAKING THE MISSIONAL CODE

made its fullest and deepest impact, many people can see the meteorite of cultural change moving their way. They can see the changes taking place in their children's lives—how they think and reason, how they view life, and how they act differently.

Evangelical churches, firmly rooted in modernity, sit in a culture that has moved beyond modern ideas. Language has changed, music has changed, and worldview has changed. Our churches need to decide whether they will be outposts of modernity in a new age or embrace the challenge of breaking a new cultural code.

### Unchurched

Is there evidence that the culture has changed? Some churches are exploding, but most are not. For example, *the percentage of Christians in the U.S. population dropped 9 percent from 1990 to 2001*. The American Religious Identification Survey 2001, released by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) showed that the percentage proportion of Christians in the U.S. has declined—from 86 percent in 1990 to 77 percent in 2001.<sup>4</sup> Now, this refers to those people who claim to be Christians, from Howard Dean to George Bush. While it is fair to say that many who claim to be Christians do not know what it means to be one, still fewer people overall identify themselves as Christians.

George Barna tends to have a charitable definition for the unchurched. They are adults who have “not attended a Christian church service within the past six months, not including a holiday service (such as Easter or Christmas) or a special event at a church (such as a wedding or funeral).” Of course, a high percentage of people tend to indicate that they do attend church at least occasionally.

Even with Barna's charitable numbers, *the number of unchurched has almost doubled from 1991 to 2004*. A Barna Group study explained, “Since 1991, the adult population in the United States has grown by 15%. During that same period, the number of adults who do not





## THE EMERGING GLOCAL CONTEXT

attend church has nearly doubled, rising from 39 million to 75 million—a 92% increase!”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the number of “churched” people is much different from looking specifically at the number of evangelicals. In addition, evangelicals have obtained political power but exercise little moral influence. For many, evangelicals have become a voting block rather than a spiritual force.

*Among evangelicals, true spiritual commitment seems to be lagging.* For example, born-again church members divorce at a higher rate than the unchurched.<sup>6</sup> This lack of commitment may also be reflected in the fact that many so-called evangelicals decide to remain unchurched. According to *Christianity Today*, “The Barna Research Group reports that in the United States about 10 million self-proclaimed, born-again Christians have not been to church in the last six months, apart from Christmas or Easter.”<sup>7</sup>

Although some churches have broken the code, in general, the church’s influence is declining both in the culture and among its own people. Instead of biblical Christianity, spirituality appears to be the preferred “religion” of North America.

Gallup provides further insight in a January 2002 poll—50 percent of Americans described themselves as “religious,” while another 33 percent said that they are “spiritual but not religious” (11 percent said neither and 4 percent said both).<sup>8</sup> A recent book, *Spiritual but Not Religious*, chronicles this growing trend.<sup>9</sup> Both the media and academia have firmly embraced and clearly promote the idea that spirituality is good and religion is bad.

This trend may explain why more students identify themselves as “no religion” rather than “Protestant” on college campuses.

Results from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA show that an equal number of incoming freshman in the fall of 2004 checked “None” as claimed “Protestant” on the question of religious identity. In total 28% identify themselves as Catholic, 17% say Protestant, 17% say “none,” 11% say “other Christian,” 4% Mormon, 4% Seventh Day





## BREAKING THE MISSIONAL CODE

Adventist, 4% Unitarian, 3% Church of Christ, 3% “other religions,” 2% Jewish, 1% each for Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Eastern Orthodox. (Spirituality Report, as reported in e-update #76)<sup>10</sup>

### **Ethnic Diversity**

The growing number of unchurched people is just part of the story. The rest of the story is the growing diversity of North America. There was a day when a viable church in a community could be considered a major part of the solution. This is no longer true. Our growing cultural diversity requires a church within the reach of every people group, population segment, and cultural environment if we are to be faithful to the Great Commission. Dave Gibbons of Newsong Church understood this when he said:

This idea of a new song started to align with a passage I had read earlier that year about new wineskins. I remember being broken by the fact that there weren't too many churches reaching the next generation who were both post-modern and multi-ethnic in flavor. As a kid, my best friends were African-American or Caucasian. I had wondered why churches were so segregated. Furthermore, I saw how most of the churches I knew weren't connecting with my friends. Church seemed so irrelevant and boring to them. Then I took a hard look at where I was serving. It was a great church yet because of its immigrant nature it was not reaching the new global village that was fast emerging. It became clear to me what the “new song” was. It was to begin a multi-ethnic movement that would reach the next generation.”<sup>11</sup>

Dave is a pioneer in breaking the code among emerging multi-ethnic churches. Since launching Newsong in 1994 they have met in over thirty locations. They are made up of fifteen different ethnic





## THE EMERGING GLOCAL CONTEXT

groups, which are predominately Asian, ranging from Korean to Japanese. They also have a growing Hispanic and African-American population within the church. Like many churches out of the emergent vein they have a strong passion for global concerns, social justice, and advocating for the poor.<sup>12</sup> Newsong illustrates the growing complexity of reaching all people in North America.

I (David) will never forget meeting with a group of second-generation Koreans. Loyal by nature, they were greatly challenged by the need to plant the church among those who were born in a Korean family but raised in an American culture, speaking English as their primary language. Because of that dynamic, their language and experiences were radically different from that of their parents. In order for the gospel to be viable to their generation, they needed a church that spoke their cultural language.

Breaking the code is about seeing the unchurched through three different sets of lenses that include people groups, population segments, and cultural environments. It is about seeing that our work as the church is not completed until God's kingdom has come home to every tribe living within a given context.



### People Groups

As more and more North Americans identify themselves with ethnic or national backgrounds, the story is about more than just the broader culture. Ethnic America does a tremendous job at revealing some telling trends. They correctly assert that this will be the “Ethnic Millennium.” For example:

- In the 90s, while the general U.S. population grew by 6 percent, Asians grew by 107 percent, Hispanics grew by 53 percent, Native Americans grew by 38 percent.
- Twenty-five of the largest U.S. cities are now majority ethnic. Ethnics make up 61 percent of Chicago, 73 percent of New York, and 78 percent of Los Angeles.





## BREAKING THE MISSIONAL CODE

- There are more Filipinos and Armenians in Los Angeles than in any city in the world. There are more Cubans in Miami than in Havana.<sup>13</sup>

Russell Begaye, cofounder of Ethnic America, explained: “We need to research the demographics, lifestyles and interests of the groups we want to reach. We need to go among the people, to make our message culturally relevant.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, there is not just one white, young, emerging cultural code to be broken. The gospel needs to penetrate every culture . . . and every culture needs to be exegeted for the gospel.

### Population Segments

In addition to the many unreached people groups or ethnic groups that now call North America home, people can be identified and segmented into many population segments. While people groups represent the largest common denominator among ethnic groups, a common language helps establish unique cultural influences within a context that certain groups share and enhances a sense of community.

Some missiologists and researchers use psychographics to help them understand how people relate and what binds them together. “Psychographics is a system for measuring consumers’ beliefs, opinions and interests. It’s like demographics but instead of counting age, gender, race, etc., it counts psychological information (opinions on abortion, religious beliefs, music tastes, personality traits, etc.). Marketing research usually combines demographic and psychographic information.”<sup>15</sup> While this may be helpful in understanding social behavior, it can also be far too complex in reality. Simply put, people are bound by common experience. It is this common experience, when significant enough, that becomes a foundation for long-term social bonding and interaction. Therefore a population segment may consist of second generation Asians, young urban runaways, factory workers, parents of sports-active children, former addicts, wealthy Anglo professionals, divorced mothers with preschoolers, cowboys,





## THE EMERGING GLOCAL CONTEXT

victims of crime, skate boarders, etc. When their common experience is significant enough to impact values, belief and lifestyle, a new tribal community comes into existence, creating the opportunity to impact this very unique population segment when the code is broken. Where this code has been broken it is not unusual to see cowboy churches, biker churches, recovery churches, and the likes emerge.

### Cultural Environments

In addition to people groups and population segments we must also consider cultural environments as part of our missionary mandate if the gospel is to be planted effectively among all people. Just as language and experience can define one's cultural preferences, geographical environments can serve as the common bond that brings people together. Today we are seeing more and more collegiate churches planted among the universities and colleges of North America. Prior to this decade one would have been hard pressed to find a church on a college campus—mainly because the code since the “Jesus Movement” has been translated into campus ministries established as an extension of certain denominations or parachurch ministry.

Jaeson Ma is a code breaking leader who established Campus Church Networks as a house church network designed to establish churches on and around college campuses. Jaeson was deeply burdened when he discovered that he was one of two Christians in a Philosophy 101 class. After beginning to prayer walk he began to see many doors open on the 28,000-student campus. After seeing many of the students come to know Christ he realized that very few of them were assimilated into a local church and that very few of the churches were prepared to minister to the college students.

After studying the Chinese model of underground house church, “he realized that a church could be planted on a college campus if a trained missionary could pray and win a student of peace or natural leader for Christ. The missionary would then teach the student leader to win his network of friends and from that network of friends start





## BREAKING THE MISSIONAL CODE

a small church. Once started, the missionary would then model for and disciple the natural student leader of the group on how to pastor the church with the goal of one day releasing him/her to actually be the pastor and train him/her to raise up their own student leaders to start other churches.<sup>16</sup> Jaeson went on to plant a house church network on the San Jose University, but God used Jaeson to help start a movement of campus churches around the world.

Collegiate churches serve as only one example of what it means to break the code among cultural environments. There are many geographical environments around North America where the code is being broken or needs to be broken, which include multihousing units, nursing homes, prisons and jails, factories, offices complexes, etc.

### A New Reality

The reality is that we are now global and local, at the same time. Some have speculated, and we think it probably is true, that North America is the most diverse nation in the world. Though nobody knows the exact number, hundreds of languages are spoken across this continent. This should clearly illustrate our need to live within the glocal context that already exists.

Being in a glocal context should cause us to think, speak, and act differently. In addition, we must recognize that while the broader culture has changed, most evangelical churches have not. The broader culture has “shifted,” and hundreds of new cultures have emerged within the existing cultural milieu. It is time for the North American church to enter its emerging glocal context.

It may sound uncharitable, but we don't mean it to be so. But . . . many will say that these shifts, and a book like this, do not matter. They are convinced if you just “preach the gospel” and perhaps “love people” that your church will reach people. They are wrong, and their ideas hurt the mission of the church. Communities across North America are filled with churches led by loving gospel preachers—most of whom, if statistics are true, are not reaching people.





## THE EMERGING GLOCAL CONTEXT

You cannot grow a biblically faithful church without loving people and preaching the gospel. But loving people means understanding and communicating with them. Preaching the gospel means to proclaim a gospel about the Word becoming flesh—and proclaiming that the body of Christ needs to become incarnate in every cultural expression.

### The Breaking the Code Challenge

1. Describe the specific people groups, population segments, and/or cultural environments that make up your geographical context.
2. What are some practical ways you can begin to expose those you minister with to opportunities to break the code?
3. How would you define success when it comes to the Great Commission in your given context?

