

## chapter 1

# Redistributing Authority

**O**n a trip to the Grand Canyon, our family decides to venture outside the national park and into the Painted Desert looking for art. We soon see a large, spray-painted sign on the horizon that promises “DINOSAUR TRACKS.” It sounds too good to pass up. After stepping from our air-conditioned car into the sweltering August air, we give a few dollars to a tour guide and follow him around the barren land as he points out ancient bones embedded in the red clay. We clutch our water bottles, sipping them frequently to get some relief from the oppressive heat and dry air. The young man has a bottle as well, but his is equipped with a squirting cap—and he uses the stream of clear liquid to precisely outline the bones and fill in the embedded claw prints.

There are, indeed, dinosaur tracks in the hardened clay. Not only that, but we also learn that the bits of red stone all around us, the same polished rock that graces so many pieces of locally crafted jewelry, is coral. Then our guide points out huge sections of the ground that are rippled and explains, “You can see that this area was once completely underwater.”

Amazed, I crouch down, tracing the hard, wavy ground with my finger. On this day, in this dusty desert, I cannot imagine how it happened. I’ve read about these things in textbooks—how landscapes

evolve, how plates shift, how animals adapt to new environments or become extinct. But I never thought I would stand in the desert and see clear evidence that it was once underwater.

When we get back into the car, my head is still spinning as I think about change. I wonder how long it took before anyone noticed that the plates of the earth were shifting. How long did it take for people to realize the masses of land were moving farther away from each other, changing the nature of what sort of creatures could survive in their new habitat? How long did it take before we noticed the slow movement, before the chaos of it all began to make some sense, before we could understand the nature of patterns that seemed so random?

Habitats change, physical landscapes shift, and humans evolve. Our very bones adapt to different circumstances and environments. Our intellectual, philosophical, and religious thought adapts and transforms in each generation. Just as the plates of the earth shift, just as our spines straighten, our own understandings of God and the church are shaped and transformed by our context. Right now in our culture, things are rumbling and moving beneath our feet. Everything is shifting.

I stand in the middle of it, feeling the rumbling. Spiritual traditions, generational wisdom, theological engagement, international compassion, and environmental concern are all moving. I observe the busy swirl as the Spirit moves in and among it all. Working closely with “loyal radicals” of the Presbyterian Church (USA), I notice old traditions being reclaimed by a creative and innovative generation, hope being carried off and reframed, and new vitality coming to the church through it all.

I see evidence of such change and innovation regularly in my work as a pastor. I often find myself snooping around old books, reading about another time and setting, gleaned from the wisdom of the past, borrowing resources from other traditions, and reframing practice and thought in a new generation. Of course, that’s nothing new; church leaders have always done a bit of that. But now our libraries are not just physical but digital as well.

The Internet has made rare texts available at my fingertips. No longer am I forced to drive for miles to cull through theological collections. I can scroll through entire libraries while sitting on my couch sipping

a cup of hot tea on a Thursday afternoon. I can sort through current academic ideas, up-to-date research, and ancient texts. If I want to delve in further, I can use the Web to buy books, journals, and papers that were once available only at the most specialized bookstores. Such easy accessibility, coupled with the fluidity of American religion,<sup>1</sup> allows me to borrow from other traditions, sorting through the wisdom of the ages and reframing it for practice today.

But I'm not only looking at the flat text. New technologies are allowing individuals to spark one another's imaginations and share resources. I find myself in the midst of constellations of thought that formed without carving out particular locations or even specific times for people to converse. A spirit of collaboration and open-source ideas has grown up in our culture so we can easily share resources and information with one another.<sup>2</sup> More and more, these exciting conversations include voices from people outside of mainstream publishing, and the publishers themselves are looking to blogs for new writing talent and to bloggers to extend the conversation about current books. Ideas that once might have caused small sparks inside our academic institutions can now catch fire and spread beyond the traditional ivory tower, as more professors begin blogging and we have wider and easier access to academic papers. This shift affects every segment of our society—and especially the church.

Knowledge (and therefore, power) is moving from the centralized institutions—our seminary bookstores, theological libraries, and academic institutions—to the margins, creating a new network of pastors, church leaders, and other public thinkers. The diffusion of authority is sweeping like a wind over our landscape. In the shifts that are taking place, we feel the breath of the Holy Spirit, blowing through conversations, relationships, and connections.

As a pastor and the mother of an eight-year-old daughter, I'm aware that just ten years ago, I'd never have been able to accomplish the amount of research I can today. Now, many streams of thought feed me all the time. While my daughter works on her homework or plays outside, I can engage in theological conversations, write, and think. I regularly converse with people all over the world about what happens in their churches.

This explosion of thought, innovation, and ideas points to the fact that in vital spiritual communities we are reframing our faith and hope. In our religious landscapes, as information and organizing abilities spread to the margins, authority shifts. With the philosophical movement of postmodernism and the technological developments of the Internet, new communities spring up, and something exciting unfolds.

We can see it happening in many different places—through the emerging church of the postevangelical movement as well as the “loyal radicals” of the denominational church, in the formation of new monastic communities and the revitalization of sacred traditions in liturgical congregations.<sup>3</sup> God works through both our passionate love of the church and our anger toward it. The progressions are not just occurring among certain age groups or denominations but across the chronological spectrum and throughout our traditions. In every corner of the church, the tectonic plates are shifting.

The change that surrounds us today will be much easier to describe retrospectively a few decades from now. But I will try to articulate what I am seeing now, to frame the cultural, technological, and church movements from my perspective as a pastor working now in the midst of vital denominational congregations deeply involved in social justice matters.

Although I will be writing about issues as large and complex as the environment and globalism, I will paint the picture from my limited viewpoint: as a pastor, who goes to work each day, ministering in a new generation; as a writer, who pounds out regular blog posts and articles, connecting with varying perspectives; and as a speaker, who travels across the country and the world engaging in conversations with various groups and denominations. I will give you a glimpse of what I see, from my standpoint.

### *Cultural Movements*

To set the landscape of our current movements, to see the larger reasons why this transfer of power to the edges has occurred, we turn our attention to what is transpiring, philosophically, in our postmodern context. I visited an exhibit on modernism at the Corcoran Art Gallery a couple of years ago, and I was stunned at the contrast between the perspective between that time and our own.<sup>4</sup> What optimism people

possessed about human ingenuity and all that we could do! One display featured a film of a highway system, in which the narrator said, without a hint of irony, that with highways, there would be no more stopping on the roadways.

Pulsing through all the exhibits was unbridled confidence. Underlying each painting, urban development plan, or kitchen appliance was the abiding notion that technology would be the answer to everything, that our own inventions would solve every domestic headache and increase our productivity. Each corner had an exuberant, commercial-like proclamation that the right conveniences and gadgets would lead us to a better life. With our ingenuity, we could find our way out of any crisis and our creativity would usher us into a day of freedom and leisure.

Much of it happened just as we imagined. Technology gave us the dishwasher, the clothes dryer, the birth control pill, and the choice for women to enter the workforce. Our innovation and resources allowed us to move from an agrarian culture to an industrialized culture. With our humming mixers and beeping microwave ovens, women have a new freedom from domestic responsibility and freedom for education and financial security. Women can settle into corners of our society where we could never have found a place before—even the pulpits of our churches.

The overall spirit of modern society was an unbounded optimism that things were getting better; they were always improving. Markets would always grow, and things will forever increase in size and scope. There would always be progress, and our children would be better off than we were. This is the culture in which most of our Christian education buildings were built and our systems of church governance were honed. We constructed steeples in the midst of this optimism.

Yet the reality of postmodernism also began to seep more and more into our popular culture, and our narratives as a people changed. The Civil Rights movement and the women's movement unfold, speaking out against the many pervasive social injustices. The Vietnam War protests, the assassinations of the 1960s, Watergate, and a whole string of other events prompt citizens to question those in authority, particularly the government. Mistrust grows and breeds. Somehow, all of a sudden, in place of the certainty of a better future ahead, apprehension begins to taint everything.

Our nation's faith in people in powerful positions took a tremendous hit during the 1960s. By the time I was born in the seventies, this distrust in the promise of power and technology were a loud and clear part of our national narrative. We no longer see cars flowing in perfect sync. Those utopian highways look more like parking lots during the hours when we most need them to flow. We are finally figuring out that the exhaust fumes belching out of tailpipes are changing our climate in drastic ways. Now, when we witness the construction of bigger highways, we're savvy enough to realize they may lead not to faster transportation but to yet more cars, more pollution, and a quicker demise of our planet.<sup>5</sup>

Technology once gave us such hope. Now we look beyond our windshield wipers and realize we are entangled in traffic patterns we cannot negotiate or resolve.

However, the most profound shift that has taken place as we've moved from the modern to the postmodern world is not one that we perceive outside of our car; instead, it is something sinking in in the drivers, something we hold within us, something that looms in our minds and heart, just barely breaking through our conscious understanding, but always there.

Children today grow up with the knowledge that while technology has greatly improved some aspects of their lives, it has also given people the ability to utterly and completely wipe out humanity. From my earliest years, I have known that our weapons have grown immense, and this possibility caused me—and my entire generation—to tremble with fear. With that seed germinating within us, with that knowledge of good and evil, we have come to understand the dark side of our creativity. We no longer have the luxury of being blindly optimistic. With realization comes responsibility. No matter who we are, we know we have to assume power. We recognized we cannot afford to trust mindlessly. We have learned to be vigilant in questioning authority. And as we grow up, we learn to challenge, doubt, reason, and test almost everything.

The effect of this shift in responsibility has led us to organize differently. In a new generation, when we make decisions, learn, create, and build, we instinctively construct a network to do it. We're not comfortable taking orders without question and not content having the weight of power in one person, so we have learned to imagine,

dream, and dispute together. Almost everything we do has taken on a communal quality, and our most popular technologies fuel a social sense of the collective.

Those spiritual communities that welcome these shifts of power will be the ones that will thrive in the years to come. Vital churches will not be those that rely on their denominational brands to draw people through their doors but those that have something creative and compelling to say about what is going on outside those doors. Growing churches will be centered on sharing conversations among those journeying a path together rather than the one-way preaching of an unquestioned authority. Effective church leaders will not look at the networking occurring in a new generation as superficial, rude, narcissistic, or indiscreet but will begin to understand the deeper realities of what's occurring in this larger conversation.

In our current culture, two forces are pulling us in opposite directions. On the one hand, there is a movement to more centralized power. And, in reaction, there is an increased empowerment of the edges. Let's take some time to examine each of these trends. First, we will take a look at the move toward conglomeration.

### *Conglomeration: The Bigger-Is-Always-Better Culture*

Many of us often feel a sense of powerlessness because so many of the resources we need to live come from a concentrated source with which we have very little connection. Our news, entertainment, clothing, food, and basic goods originate from a handful of mainstream corporations, who do all they can to ensure they can reach as many consumers as possible. People are constantly encouraged to want more, which leaves us with gut-level frustration.<sup>6</sup>

We work under the assumption that continued growth is essential. For a business to be successful, for an economy to be vital, for a church to be healthy, it must be growing—rapidly. Yet, this corporate conglomeration, with its unwavering pursuit of continued growth, has resulted in a loss of community and connection. We no longer borrow money from a local bank staffed by friends who have an intimate knowledge of our family situation. Instead our mortgages are sliced

up and sold to numerous lending companies until the act of lending is far removed, and the identity of the borrower as well as the mutual responsibility that was once so necessary in such large transactions has become lost.

This loss of connection is not just apparent in the large things but in small things as well. I know that the head of lettuce I buy at the supermarket takes a journey of a thousand miles, wasting petroleum and polluting the air before it reaches my dinner plate.<sup>7</sup> We are often forced to buy our goods from big-box stores, dragging ourselves through miles of aisles, despairing of ever finding an employee who might answer a simple question. Adding to the frustration, we know the money we spend will not benefit our own hometowns.<sup>8</sup> Even our once proudly independent and quirky coffeehouses have been taken over by giant corporations. Now the commercialized coffeehouse replicas can be found on highway exits, situated between McDonalds and the truck stop.

We no longer know how our shirts are being made, who's making them, how much those workers are being paid, how old they are, or how long their working hours are. We gave up a whole lot of our own influence on how our vegetables should be grown or how many hormones ought to be injected into our poultry. Children do not know where food comes from, and they are often stunned to learn that the chicken on their plates is the same thing as the chicken on Old MacDonald's farm (which itself has become more or less a distant memory).

We feel hopeless in our political climate as well. Angry and frustrated by the wars, lies, and torture perpetrated in our country's name, we seem to be powerless. No matter how massive the protests are, no matter how passionate we are about ending violence, stopping genocide, or feeding starving people, we have a dispiriting sense that a few people with a lot more money are making the important—but not always good—decisions on behalf of all of us.

What does all this have to do with the local church? How does this conglomeration of power in our culture, this shift that can be felt in our commerce, affect our ministries? Well, just as our downtown churches grew up in the optimism of the modern era, megachurches are one of the defining religious trends of this bigger-is-always-better culture. Founded on the outskirts of town, the megachurches overshadowed

our neighborhood churches by their sheer scale. Suddenly, there was an expectation within the pastorate of leading a church with a membership in the thousands. Programs became so much bigger and ostensibly better in these huge churches that people would flock to them from miles away. People were no longer looking for the big steeple of the downtown congregation but the big parking lot in suburbia.<sup>9</sup> Members no longer sought a pastor with whom they could share a family meal and confide in during times of crisis, but a charismatic star who could preach an exciting and entertaining sermon that would invigorate them and get them through the week.

When I first became pastor of a small church in rural southern Louisiana, the Fruit of the Loom factory in the town had just closed down. Since that had been the town's main source of employment, there had been a population exodus. The residents left there were mostly retired, unemployed, or situated well below the national poverty level. A large segment of the population could not read. I felt called to that place, even though I knew full well that the demographic data did not support the likelihood of immediate and massive growth for the local Presbyterian congregation.

Yet, when I spoke about my new vocation, there was an expectation that if I did my job well, the church would increase in size—and not just incrementally. People seemed to expect this small rural congregation would become some sort of megachurch within just a few years. People would tell me what kind of programs had made their church grow, or about their charismatic pastor who created a booming congregation in the middle of nowhere, and members would drive for miles just to be a part of it.

I would try to explain that I was not walking into that sort of situation. I was going to a small, downtown church that used to be the center of the community's communication and entertainment, but it was no longer the focus of community life there. Things had changed in the little town. But the expectation persisted that under the right sort of leadership, with just the right pastor, the congregation would become something that it was not. We would meet in pastors' groups, where the men (I was always the only woman) would compare the sizes of their respective congregations, and then the guy with the biggest church would impart his wisdom to the rest of us.

The pressure was external, but I have to admit that it became internal as well. The assumption that success equaled quick and massive growth loomed over me. Even though the church did expand at a healthy pace, I never felt I was doing quite enough. The well-intentioned members would often assess the situation: “Things are going great, pastor.” And then they would add, with urgency, “Now how are we going to get *more* folks in these pews?”

The model for ministry had changed since the time when a downtown church attracted a couple of hundred members. We were living in a bigger-is-better time. The new expectation was that a congregation wasn’t truly vital unless it was attracting thousands. That was the assumption, and yet, it clearly was not the ministry we were doing best in Abbeville. We were growing a small, intergenerational community.

Everywhere I looked, from conferences to books to denominational gatherings, I saw little support for churches like mine. Educational materials were way out of our price range, and we could not touch the technology “they” said we needed. There were no resources and few models for solid church ministry in the small church. Those few congregations teeming with thousands of members were celebrated, but there seemed to be no room for the rest of us.

In this milieu, pastors and churches become understandably tired. Church growth is no longer about a steady 10 percent increase but about how to attract thousands in less than ten years. Churches are no longer “planted”—now they are “launched.” We’re encouraged to study these superchurches and emulate their programs and services. In the process, the size of the congregation has become what matters, instead of the quality of the community, or the spiritual vitality, or the formation of faith. Evangelism is no longer a sacrificial service devoted to spreading the good news and serving as a beacon of hope for individuals and our neighborhood. Instead it has turned into a self-serving exercise to get “those people” into our building so that we can construct even bigger buildings and larger programs. As a result, people outside the church view the new generation of Christians as uncaring and see the church’s evangelism efforts as manipulative.<sup>10</sup>

The net effect is that church leaders and congregations alike are left feeling as if we are not enough, and as if we will never be enough.<sup>11</sup> Then, depleted and defeated, we pastors forget our calling: to take

care of the handful of people there every Sunday who are a part of our spiritual communities, to challenge them to see the deep hunger and needs of the world around them, and to figure out how we can become the hands and feet of Jesus. We forget that people go to church for the same reason they've always gone to church—not because it is the biggest and most entertaining place in town, but because they have in their core a spiritual longing to be fed.

From our produce to our political power to our pulpits, we decided bigger is better. We opted for less personal contact. We began to lose sight of what is good for our communities and began to focus on the individual. However, the bigger-is-always-better attitude left us empty, anxious, and depressed.<sup>12</sup>

### *Meanwhile . . . Along the Edges*

Amid this frustrating, hopeless conglomeration of commerce, right in the middle of our bigger-is-always-better attitude, and even as the megachurch has become the model of what church ought to be, something else is happening. There is a slow but perceptible movement to the edges. The fringes of our society and our spiritual lives are looking better and better. A new generation is reframing hope as we begin to see the beauty and richness of caring communities.

Just as the conglomeration has happened in every area of our culture, the movement to the edges can likewise be detected in many spheres of society, including our entertainment, information, news, and politics.<sup>13</sup> As we move toward music and books that do not need hard media, companies do not have to rely on stocked inventory and limited warehouse space. Therefore, they can provide more options. With more choices, people are beginning to look for music from smaller bands or publications that may never grace the *New York Times*' bestseller list.

Farmers markets are gaining popularity as we realize just how much damage big agribusiness is doing to our earth and how much petroleum we consume by shipping produce from all over the world to our refrigerators. More and more people are digging up patches of their lawns so they can create gardens. Realizing their children will actually

eat their vegetables if they have a hand in growing them, busy parents have bought hoes and now aspire to growing the perfect tomato.

As the stock market crashes, volatility shakes our economic foundations. We are beginning to pay dearly for the skyrocketing housing costs that outpaced our salaries long ago. We are starting to understand that rampant growth can wreak havoc on a society, especially when it is fueled by ever-increasing debt.<sup>14</sup>

We are beginning to realize smaller might really be better—or, at least, that there ought to be limits to growth. We've realized what we've been missing in our big box stores on our seemingly endless walks under the fluorescent lights—meeting anyone who might be able to talk to us and help us. More and more, we're turning off our televisions and finding value in homegrown entertainment. And we are finding great spiritual vitality in our neighborhood churches, the ones with smaller parking lots and communities of people who really know and care for one another.<sup>15</sup>

In this innovative generation, people are using emerging technologies to communicate with one another, to let their voices be heard, and to express their frustration with the conglomerating markets and entertainment. Alongside cynicism, frustration, and powerlessness has grown an ability to call out in small ways. Unfortunately, this option is not equally available to everyone; there is a digital divide that tends to make the gap between the haves and the have-nots even wider. Yet, we cannot ignore that there has been a shift when we review our homegrown entertainment, questioning of information, empowerment in the political system, and conversation in our religious communities. Let's take a moment to consider each of these areas a bit more closely.

## ENTERTAINMENT

More than a decade ago, MTV launched its first reality television show: *The Real World*. The concept was simple enough: Take a group of (sort of) regular people, put them in a house together, and film whatever happens. Since then, we have seen countless “reality” shows, these documentaries of common life. Likewise we stage huge, televised talent shows like *American Idol*, where the audience members vote to determine who wins.

At the heart of this entertainment trend is the celebration of the noncelebrity. The ordinary becomes entertaining. And a new generation has taken this to amazing heights. We went from television networks producing reality shows to people creating such shows themselves. YouTube has become a way for people to take their living room entertainment and broadcast it to the world—and people are watching. Blogs have become a platform for people to self-publish their own insights, rants, and reviews. Social networking sites like FaceBook allow us to connect with friends and strangers from around the world. And it is all very entertaining—so much so that television is losing a whole generation of younger viewers.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, our culture's fascination with the celebrity has not disappeared, but we seem most interested in the ways in which the celebrities are just like us. We like to read about the glamorous singer who ventured onto the red carpet in a terrible dress, or onto the beach with embarrassing cellulite, or even into the rehab center with a heartbreaking addiction. We become fascinated with celebrities who remind us that they have fabulous wealth, stunning talent, and terribly unglamorous humanity.

## NEWS MEDIA

The power of media is shifting thanks to a new generation that rarely picks up the morning paper. We no longer gather around the five o'clock evening news to learn what's going on in our world. Rather, we rely on Internet news sources and media we can talk back to, with comments. While Dan Rather may once have been the unquestionable authority, the *Washington Post* now hosts online chats with its journalists. They have realized they can no longer present themselves as the unquestioned experts if they want to engage a new generation. It is no longer enough to have a degree from the right school or years of experience; journalists need to be open to dialogue and discussion. In fact, it is just as much through handling these conversations that they gain their expertise. I write a blog for the *Huffington Post*, and I'm fascinated by the publishing changes this innovative news source represents. While they may not have the fact-checkers and editors of traditional newspapers, with so many viewers commenting on each post, factual errors quickly come

to light. We use Twitter to share news, information, and observations with those who follow us, and over time, these form an ongoing discussion. Through posting articles on Facebook, we can rapidly gather a discussion on pertinent news as well.

In the same vein, the trend of fake news and news parodies has grown from a short weekly segment on *Saturday Night Live* to a nightly hour of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. The online and print publication *The Onion* has gained huge popularity with its faux headlines. Each of these sources encourages us to pick apart our cultural assumptions, question our authorities, and laugh and play in the midst of fearful situations.

## POLITICS

Few have understood these cultural shifts better than President Barack Obama. No matter what our personal politics might be or how we evaluate his presidency, I would be remiss if I didn't mention Obama's 2008 presidential campaign in this context.

President Obama's commitment to community and grassroots organizing, as well as his understanding of young progressive Christians, made his campaign incredibly savvy about how a new generation communicates. At the very beginning, his campaign hired a designer from Facebook to set up social networking on his website. Since I don't watch much television, I never saw any televised ads for the Obama campaign. But I repeatedly saw a moving YouTube video that featured Obama's soaring words accompanied by the vocals of will.i.am from the Black-Eyed Peas. The video was sent to me through e-mails; it was posted on blogs I read regularly; I saw it through my social networks.

I found these videos much more powerful and compelling than traditional televised political ads because they were introduced to me by trusted friends rather than by corporate America. Obama understood better than any major political figure before him that his campaign would get credibility not only from influential men and women supporting him but also from word-of-mouth, as one friend told another. In addition, many of Barack Obama's most captivating visual posters were not designed by a Manhattan advertising agency; instead, they came from a well-known graffiti artist named Shepard Fairey. The designs literally came from the streets. Obama understood

that in a new generation, reliable information does not radiate from a central power; rather it moves underground, through networks, streets, relationships, and friends.

During the campaign, Obama's message of "Yes, we can" was more than just a logo or a hip-hop song. It was his way of doing business, as he empowered a new generation to resist the cynicism that corporate and political power can foster. It allowed ordinary people to dream, to imagine how they could change the world. And it acknowledged the important shift in power from "he" to "we." And that transference generated great hope.

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a Lutheran pastor and author who has written a book about Christian commercialism. Reflecting on her work in a recent interview, she said, "I used to get upset about the fact that millions of people love Joel Osteen, but then I remembered that millions of people love Hot Pockets, and that made me feel better."<sup>17</sup> While it's easy for us to become frustrated with the religious conglomeration that grows up alongside and so closely mirrors our consumer culture, we can also celebrate the fact that shifts are occurring toward the edges of our Christian culture as well.

We see the movement in minor ways. The Internet has made the cost of reaching a worldwide audience quite small. I have appreciated the effects of this diffusion of power in my own writing. At first I sat hunched over my computer, laboriously writing magazine articles and sending them out to various publications, only to receive rejection letters. Then I began a blog, and as I posted those same articles on a website, I began to gain a substantial readership. Magazines and newspapers I'd never even submitted to because I assumed they were far out of my reach began linking to my blog and turning to it as a resource. Before long magazines and book-publishing companies were contacting me, and I quickly realized that my writing did not solely rely on the traditional channels within the publishing industry.

I remembered that my mother, with the same writerly intentions, began a small newspaper when she was about my age. The difference was that she had to buy the presses, paper, and postage. She relied heavily on volunteers to put the physical product together. It was an

ambitious and expensive task. Now, after the initial investment in a computer and the cost of ongoing Internet service, my mother and I have both learned to write blog posts and press “publish.” As long as I keep the conversation interesting and post regularly, people keep coming back.

As a result, I have become a part of a larger network of bloggers (most of them pastors) who read and exchange ideas constantly. We dream of changing the world and write funny stories about what the people in our churches said as they shook our hands after worship on Sunday morning. We share mundane frustrations about Sunday school supply rooms that are never left clean and try to figure out what to do about poverty and the environment.

Those are small examples, but we can also see the huge and dramatic effects of technology, even within religious movements. In the fall of 2007, Buddhist monks in Burma began to withhold the alms bowls from military families as an act of protest. Instantly, the world saw what was happening, despite the country’s closed government, because of cameras on cell phones. The pictures were taken and sent all over the world by e-mail.<sup>18</sup> Suddenly, people across the globe saw the brutal images of the peaceful orange robes being stained with blood. Cellular capabilities were quickly shut down, but the information was already out. The world was aware and could express its horror because regular people with mobile phones in hand gained momentary power over a forceful regime. As the prayers of U.S. Christians joined the cries of those young Buddhist monks suffering half a world away, we knew something had changed. Even in that most authoritarian of regimes, a bit of power had shifted so that briefly the oppressed had a voice.

In tragedy, protest, celebration, and Christian formation, we grapple with the optimistic advances and enduring suffering to which our technology has testified. We realize how speech, influence, and even our religious convictions have shifted a bit to the edges. Now, in this exciting moment in history, when so much is in transition, we are forming new religious communities and finding vitality in older congregations, and we are reframing hope. It is in this time that we religious leaders who inhabit the outskirts and the edges must look anew at the ways in which we gather.

## NOTES

1. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic” (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2008), <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.
2. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 27–28.
3. Tony Jones writes about the emerging church in *The New Christians* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). Two examples of “loyal radicals” who pastor in innovative ways while remaining committed to their denominations are Nadia Bolz-Weber, founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints and author of *Salvation on the Small Screen? Twenty-four Hours of Christian Television* (New York: Seabury Books, 2008), and Nannette Sawyer, founding pastor of Wicker Park Grace and author of *Hospitality the Sacred Art: Discovering the Hidden Spiritual Power of Invitation and Welcome* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007). Jonathan Wilson-Hartgove wrote *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).
4. *Modernism: Designing a New World 1914–1939* (Washington: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2008), <http://www.corcoran.org/Modernism/index.htm>.
5. Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How It Can Renew America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 43.
6. Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 5–11.
7. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 110–111.
8. McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 107. McKibben points out that “counties with Wal-Marts have grown poorer than surrounding counties, and the more Wal-Marts they had, the faster they grew poorer.”
9. David Williams, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, often writes of the transition of the church from the big steeple to the big parking lot. He blogs at BelovedSpear.org.
10. Kinnemann and Lyons, *UnChristian*, 67.
11. Sally Morgenthaler, “Does Ministry Fuel Addictive Behavior?” ChristianityTodayLibrary.com. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2006/winter/24.58.html>.
12. McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 34–36.
13. Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*. (New York: Hyperion Books, 2008), 8–9. Anderson, the editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, largely follows music as he explains that we have moved from

a culture of hits to one of hits and niches. The Internet makes consumers less dependent on the physical inventory on a small store and allows lesser known authors, musicians, and artists to sell more. Of course, in this movement, we see conglomeration and dissemination working at the same time, because companies that are learning to sell niche products are getting bigger and bigger. Amazon is one example.

14. In *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007), I write about the need for economic understanding while ministering to young adults. The economic frustrations that were hidden when that book was published have come to light more in recent years.

15. Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 41–42. Bass talks at great length about the “new village church.”

16. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, “The State of the Media Democracy: Are You Ready for the Future of Media?” 2007, [http://images.digitalmedianet.com/2007/Week\\_30/uj1ex4vc/story/deloittemediademocracysurvey.pdf](http://images.digitalmedianet.com/2007/Week_30/uj1ex4vc/story/deloittemediademocracysurvey.pdf). The survey states that television viewing is down for younger generations, while the creation of and demand for user-generated content is up.

17. Nadia Bolz-Weber, Carol Howard Merritt, and Bruce Reyes-Chow, “Bruce and Carol Talk with Nadia Bolz-Weber,” *God Complex Radio*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/godcomplexradio/2009/06/01/Bruce-and-Carol-Talk-with-Nadia-Bolz-Weber>.

18. Edward Cody, “Deadly Crackdown Intensifies in Burma,” *The Washington Post*, September 28, 2007.