

The Impact of Modernity on Spirituality

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Seek me and live;
do not seek Bethel,
do not go to Gilgal,
do not journey to Beersheba.
For Gilgal will surely go into exile,
and Bethel will be reduced to nothing (Amos 5:4b-5).

During the time of Amos Israel was experiencing wealth and power unknown since the times of David and Solomon. Amos spoke of the luxury enjoyed by Israel's upper class, the summer and winter houses and the mansions adorned with ivory (Amos 3:15). Bright (1972, 255) notes that the splendid buildings unearthed in Samaria showed that Amos was not exaggerating. The centres of worship in Israel, Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were filled with worshippers. It was thus something of a shock when the prophet condemned the religion of Israel. "Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more," cried Amos (4:4). In Amos 5 he uttered his denunciation of Israelite society in the form of a lament. Why is this so? Bright also notes (1972, 256) that "in spite of its healthy appearance [it] was in an advanced state of decay, socially, morally, and religiously." It was not that the people were irreligious; it was that religion was somehow debased, being unable to change or transform society. Instead society had changed and had perverted Israel. Israel had the wrong conception of her God and the expectation He had of the people. This was seen in Israel's misconception of the Day of the Lord (5:18-27). It was a dead religion.

We can look at the experience of Israelite society from several perspectives. We can look at this passage from a theological or homiletical perspective in that the people of God should be sensitive to the moral character of the God they worship. We may even say that the heart is deceitful, and that God always has to send His prophets to confront evil and to denounce sin. This is so at every age of human history, even during the time of the redeemed society of Israel. The other perspective is to look at this from a "social" dimension. By this I am asking, How is it that Israelite society changed to the extent that its religion could be flourishing but yet debased?

To be more precise I am interested in the question of how a religion can be transformed by social forces. The upshot is that we can devise appropriate strategies when we know the problem.

Citing Amos is but only a convenient springboard to a discussion on spirituality and modernity. Are there any resemblances? Singapore is rich in comparison with the surrounding nations. The church is growing. The percentage of Christians has grown from 9.9% as reported in the 1980 census to 12.6% in 1990. Tong Chee Kiong (1989) has noted that the proportion of Christians is much higher in the upper economic class of the population. Christians are the cultural elite. One wonders, beyond these glowing statistics whether a prophet would pass a similar scathing denunciation on religion in Singapore. The resemblances are superficial. The purpose of this paper is not to attack Christianity in Singapore. Rather I would like to examine how society or, to be more precise, modernity, has affected Christianity in general and on spirituality in particular.

1 Modernity

To set the stage for a discussion it may be appropriate to have a brief definition of the term modernity. As early as 1929 political commentator Walter Lippmann spoke of the "acids of modernity" which were "dissolving the traditional understanding of the universe that previously had enabled human beings to explain all their relevant experience" (quoted in Smith, 1985, 1). Modernity can be used to describe the "*overarching intellectual ideology of a historical period whose hegemony has lasted from the French Revolution to the present . . . and whose sociological features have been accurately delineated by writers such as . . . Peter Berger*" (Oden, 1990, 46, emphasis his). This "overarching ideology" has changed the traditional mindset of people in society. It is an understanding of reality which enables human beings to explain all their relevant experiences and which controls their thinking and gives the rationale for acting the way they do. The mindset we have today is generally attributed to the results of three great revolutions in human history -- the capitalist revolution which started in the fifteenth century, the industrial or technological revolution which started in the late eighteenth century, and the ideological revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Guinness, 1990, 284).

We can also understand the notion of modernity by looking at the change from "traditional" society to "modern" society. This change, coming in the wake of the industrial and ideological revolutions, saw the growth of cities as society urbanized, the exponential expansion of information and technology, and the state taking over social services like welfare and education. As a result the individual was uprooted from his tribe, ethnic group, or village, etc. The individual ends up looking at himself as an *individual*. Freed from this "tradition-bound" mindset the individual has to "reconstruct" his mindset or self-identity from a plurality of roles: as a member of a family, ethnic group, a taxpayer and voter, etc. (Kwok, 1993, 5-6).^[1] Furthermore, due to urbanization there is an influx of people from different villages and localities. As a result "a broad spectrum of more or less distinct cultural traditions are brought in close proximity to one another" (Hunter, 1983, 12). Such a plurality of distinct cultural traditions has an impact on the individual's religious outlook. He often has to deal with competing monopolistic views on religion and quite often the individual tends toward treating religion as a "private matter."

1.1 An example of such a world view which controls thoughts and behaviour is appropriate here. Researchers have noted that older Hongkongers have a "weaker propensity to take legal action or engage in litigious undertakings" (Lau, 1988, 6). They explain this as being the result

of a mindset which is best expressed in a Chinese aphorism: *sheng bu ru guanmen, si bu ru diyu* (you avoid entering the door of the officials when you are living just as you avoid going to hell after death). This explains the traditional reluctance of many to have anything to do with the authorities. Many attitudes and philosophies are explained by such aphorisms.

This attitude is certainly not that of modern Hongkongers or, for that matter, modern Singaporeans. Obviously a change in mindset has resulted. Sociologists have noted that such an overarching ideology or reality is socially constructed. Our mindset often mirrors the world around us. As the society changes, our mindset changes, while we remain largely unaware of these changes. Hence, it is important that to understand such developments in our world and how our faith and practice have been modified. Too often such modification is a distortion of the gospel.

1.2 Another example of how our mindset changes as a result of the changes in society is Neil Postman's analysis of the change from the "typographic mind" prior to the nineteenth century to the "show business" mentality of the late twentieth century. He cites the interesting debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in 16 October 1854. In this debate Douglas delivered a three-hour address before Lincoln was supposed to have given his reply. But it was 5 p.m. in the evening and Lincoln suggested, to the approval of the audience, that the meeting adjourn for dinner before his reply. Furthermore, Douglas was to give his rejoinder. The audience agreed amicably and the event happened as agreed (1985, 44). Postman notes that such a debate would almost never happen nowadays. The media, especially television, has so affected the modern mind that the public is generally not able to accept such a lengthy and sustained discourse. Television is at its best when it is showing "moving pictures -- millions of them, of short duration and dynamic variety. It is in the nature of the medium that it must suppress the context of ideas in order to accommodate the requirements of visual interest; that is to say, to accommodate the values of show business" (1985, 92). We are in the age of show business. Ellul calls this change a "mutation of our intelligence and intellectual process" and suggests that the advent of the image-oriented person is "the greatest mutation known to humankind since the stone age.(1988, 209, 204)"

1.2.1 Leaders in Singapore are aware of the problem posed by the media. In the national day rally's message on 21 August 1994 Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong is of the opinion that the media is to be blamed for many of society's ills. When television is used as child-minder instead of the parents or grandparents, the media would be the transmitter of values. The PM objected, quite rightly, to certain types of advertisements which encourage unacceptable behaviour.

One may think that Western society with a free press is at a greater risk than a society such as Singapore, which holds the media accountable. Yet one should also realize that there are limits to what a government can do. If Postman's analysis is correct then no amount of control, short of banning television, will make things better.

Sut Jhally, professor of communications at the University of Massachusetts, did some research on pop videos and was astonished by the barrage of sexual images through such vehicles as MTV. It was reported that he compiled 165 sexier clips from MTV. When he showed it to his class his students, naturally, sang along with the clips. Next he showed the same video with more

somber music but his students were not sure what he wanted to prove. It was only when he gave his own comments that the students paid attention to his criticism. He said, "I wouldn't say these sexualized images are the same as pornography but, in some ways, it is more effective than pornography because it is everywhere. The irony is that MTV has sued him for copyright infringement perhaps to prevent him from propagating his views (*Straits Times* 13 March 1992). MTV shown in Singapore must, like all other programmes, pass muster with the Board of Censors. Nonetheless values, such as treating women as sex objects, are transmitted. Such shows are beamed into the living rooms. Nowadays media people talk about the MTV generation, children brought up since the advent of MTV, whose characteristics are a very short attention span and the desire to have issues presented so that they are easily digested.

Not only is the MTV generation afflicted by the "curse" of the short attention span. The wonderful technological device -- the TV remote control -- is causing fundamental changes to television broadcasting. Because there is such a wide number of channels, people are tempted to change channels (channel surfing) after only a few seconds if the programme does not hold their attention. Hence, TV has to "move." Even politicians in the US take pains to express their view in a *few seconds* so that they appear "live" on the screen giving comments rather than to risk having their speech summarized with only a photograph of themselves shown, if they spoke "too long."

There are other constraints too. The land mass in Singapore is very small. The air waves of the island state are open to broadcasts from neighbours like Malaysia and Indonesia. The reality of this situation was seen in the shock waves in 1988 when Radio Batam garnered 14 percent of daily listenership in Singapore. The result of this was the revamp of SBC radio (now RCS) into various niches like Symphony 92.4, Class 95, Perfect 10, Heart 91.3, etc. (*Straits Times*, 17 October 1992). Another interesting point to note is that the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation was privatized and the television broadcasting arm renamed Television Corporation of Singapore. As such it is largely driven by commercial motives. Ratings are now even more important. Many of the locally programmes follow the tried and tested format of the West. In August 1994 we saw "breakfast" television introduced (AM Singapore). The format follows exactly the American breakfast shows. Towards the end of 1996 *News at Seven* introduced another format change. It started having a person introduce the weather report with almost the same "glitzy" graphics as the American channels. The aim of course is to increase viewership and ratings which will be translated into more advertising revenue.

The shows that will be imported are those which are popular. Never mind that Bart Simpson is condemned by many educationists, and that Baywatch and other "soap operas" have no "cultural" value. Then again there are shows like Wheel of Fortune, which encourages conspicuous consumption as the audience "wows" over the fabulous prizes.^{iii[2]} Singapore's version is the *Pyramid Games*. Viewers going for more "culture" must either watch Premier 12, which is subsidized, or borrow videos tapes from the British Council. Indeed Symphony 92.4 had to change its format and bring in more "popular" music, much to the dismay of classical enthusiasts. If the media is responsible for many of society's ills in the West and if we are following the same format we should expect similar problems to appear in our society.

The church consists of members who are also members of society. As such they cannot be unaffected by the values and mores of society. It is our duty, therefore, as leaders of the church to be aware of the dangers, sound the warning and to reflect on what courses of action we can recommend.

The human mindset is the product of society. When we speak of modernity it is helpful to explicitly enumerate the elements. In the first chapter of this book Chuck Lowe has analyzed the challenge of modernity. He argues that the basic effects of modernity are a *secularized*, *privatized* and *pluralized* society. All these are inimical to religion, and specifically, to Christianity. This paper will deal with the three and the way they affect the concept and practice of spirituality.

2 Spirituality

The discussion of spirituality is complicated by the fact that people often have different understanding of the concept. Wuthnow (1994, 438), cites a study done by Conrad Cherry, director of the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University, where 8% of respondents regard spirituality as contact with a supernatural world, 5% call it a way of life, 11% consider it as something about their own convictions and practices, 46% call it a system of beliefs or doctrines, 2% take it as a system of morality, 16% don't know what it means, and 7% believe it has no meaning. On the popular level spirituality is more likely to be taken as personal convictions in contrast to religion, which is more likely to be related to churches or organizations.

The difficulty is further compounded by the lack of a model of evangelical spirituality. We see this point discussed in McGrath (1993, 123-145) in a chapter entitled "The Quest for an Evangelical Spirituality." One possible reason, according to McGrath, is that many evangelicals are "born-again" and as such come from a secular context rather than from a tradition with a deep spiritual heritage. Similarly, Mark Noll (1994, 63) notes that the revival experience of American evangelicalism often results in an attitude of anti traditionalism. Evangelicalism seems, at best, to be ambivalent toward spirituality, at worst, to have a "total lack of . . . interest in spirituality" (McGrath, 1993, 126).

2.1 One characteristic of "evangelical" spirituality is a balance between a "purely intellectual or cerebral approach" and a "purely interiorized approach" (McGrath, 1993, 129). The former engages the mind and nothing else. If we are just interested in the study of theology and do not pay attention to how it can affect our wills, our imaginations, our feelings, or if we are not interested in how it may have a bearing on the miraculous then we end up being dry and arid. On the other hand, a purely interiorized approach is interested in the mystical to the extent that it has very little to do with the realities of practical living *in this world*. Another way of looking at "evangelical" spirituality is to say that it seeks both to be Bible-centred and at the same time to engage and transform the entire person as he relates to the world.

It is Bible-centred because it is concerned with "the personal redemptive encounter of the believer with Christ" (McGrath, 1993, 129). Bruce Waltke, in his discussion of evangelical spirituality (1988, 9), cites the tradition of Augustine and Calvin where spirituality is defined in terms of love of God and love of man. Waltke notes approvingly that spirituality is grounded in

the Shema (Deut 6:4-5), "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," and reaffirmed in Jesus' pronouncement of the greatest commandment (Mk 12:29-30). *But this definition begs the question of what this love is*, a question which Waltke proceeds to answer as "a God-centred life," "a kingdom-centred life," and "the spiritual life." Hence, Waltke also looks at spirituality in terms of being Bible-centred. But spirituality is more than cognitive knowledge. It also engages and transform the person because it is also concerned with "personal discipline, spiritual formation, and the various difficulties that anyone trying to deepen the quality of their spiritual life routinely encounters" (McGrath, 1993, 129).

In an earlier book *Roots That Refresh*, Alister McGrath describes spirituality as "the Christian life." It is not *ideas*, "but rather the way in which those ideas make themselves visible in the life of Christian individuals and communities. Spirituality represents the interface between ideas and life, between Christian theology and human existence" (1991, 23). McGrath goes on to describe the fact that the Protestant fathers are hesitant to use the term spirituality because of the Roman Catholic association. Thus the more common description are words like "devotion," "godliness," "holiness," and "piety" (1991, 24).

McGrath (1991, 25) also relates the notion of spirituality to the traditional discussion of the dichotomy between spirit and flesh. The former deals with the cultivation of the "spiritual" which implies the "interior nurture of the soul, undertaken in withdrawal from the distractions of ordinary life." McGrath argues that an interpretation of 1 Cor 2:14-15 leads one to the position "of the 'spiritual' as *life in the world orientated towards God*" instead of an argument for withdrawal from the world. McGrath lists the key characteristics of Reformation spirituality as: 1) being grounded and nourished on Scripture; 2) insisting that the quest for human identity, authenticity, and fulfillment cannot be undertaken in isolation from God; 3) recognizing the priesthood and vocation of all Christian believers; and 4) grounded in and orientated towards life in the everyday world, i.e., not withdrawing from the world.

2.2 Whereas some people may define spirituality before embarking on a discussion, others approach the topic from the perspective of the practice of spirituality. Some such books are *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Willard, 1988) and *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (Whitney, 1991). Others, like *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Alexander, 1988) deal with how respective traditions would deal with issues. Others speak of rediscovering the rich heritage of spiritual renewal: *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Lovelace, 1979). Dallas Willard (1988, 17) made an interesting remark when he says that after Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* in 1978, books on the subject became plentiful. He quoted Foster's observation that during research on the topic he could not find a single book published on the subject of fasting from 1861 to 1954. Willard gave his opinion on why there is such a renewed interest lately (he refers to the 1980s). He believes that people in the 1970s perceived the 1960s as a period of great laxness. "The images of hippies, street riots, and Dr. Spock were strongly and negatively fixed in people's minds. There was generally a hunger for order and a somewhat fearful sense that at the foundation of our personal and social life lay forces that, if not carefully channeled, could swallow us up in boredom or in chaos and violence" (1988, 19-20). He suggested that this change in attitude toward spiritual discipline was also responsible in producing the growth of psychology. Faith and practice, unfortunately, did not bring about "peace or health of mind and

soul" let alone mature Christlikeness. Looking at the comment of Willard it can be argued that McGrath's warning not to seek human identity, authenticity and fulfilment in isolation apart from God (see above 2.1) is pertinent. We will have occasion to discuss this in section 3.2.3 in this paper.

2.3 As stated earlier spirituality is both Bible-centred and concerned with human transformation *as believers relate to the world*. Therein lies both its strength and its weakness. Its strength lies in the possibility of transforming society when it is vibrant and attractive. Both McGrath (1990) and J. I. Packer (1990) feel that the spirituality as understood and practised by the Puritans is the model which evangelicals should consider appropriating. But there is a possible danger in the very fact that man has to relate his faith to the world. This is because spirituality can so easily conform to the mindset of the world.

The conceptual difficulty of this paper lies in the choice of a model of spirituality. To face the challenge of modernity one needs to have some idea of what spirituality ought to be. We need to know and describe the tradition that we ought be developing. But I have just noted that evangelicalism does not have a model for spirituality. At best what we can do is to describe what *is* happening and what *has* happened. This brings us to the next issue. Which spirituality should be the object of our inquiry? Christianity came to Singapore through the ministry of missionaries and they have left behind a spiritual legacy. Events in the West still have a profound impact on Christianity in Singapore. I have, by expediency, decided to look at the heritage of the Puritans and to see how it has been modified by modernity. Much has already been written on this and the aims of this paper are to introduce the reader to the literature, and to see how much the same can apply to Singapore.

In this essay I will be looking at the notion of spirituality from several angles. The first is in the understanding of spirituality. This is the way a Christian understands himself in relationship to God, to others, and to things. One helpful category is what Max Weber describes as the "inner-world asceticism," a term describing a "total life ethic," an entire system of values, attitudes and beliefs about human conduct (Hunter, 1987, 50). The assumption is that by comparing one's understanding with that of previous generations one gets a sense of how the concept of spirituality has changed. The second angle looks at how pluralism may have enervated our spiritual vitality. The third is in the "practice" of spirituality. This is the motivation, or lack of it, to attain new heights in devotion and holiness. All three are somewhat related. For example, one's understanding of himself in relation to God cannot be independent, at least for Christianity, of the desire to attain a standard of holiness. Nonetheless a distinction is drawn between knowing and doing because they neatly reflect how privatization has affected the understanding of spirituality, and how secularization (evidenced by scientific or managerial rationalism) has affected the practice of spirituality.

3 Privatization and its effects on spirituality

One of the features of modernity is the dichotomy between the public and private domain. In modern societies, institutions like the modern state, professions, bureaucracies (such as education and National Service), and the modern corporation have sprung up. These institutions define what is normative in terms of the mode of thought, conduct, and social relationships. At the same time what is "left over" are the private aspects; e.g., social relationships, family, a person's sense

of identity, and the way he constructs meaning in life. One effect is that in the process of constructing the self one ends up very differently from his forbears. The second effect is the problem that the public sphere is often big and impersonal, abstract and alienating. The individual is left to seek out in the private world that which he lacks; e.g., freedom, satisfaction. The role that religion plays is confined more and more to the private domain, and the satisfaction of personal needs.

3.1 The construction of self-identity

David Lyon (1985, 61) notes that one impact of modernity is the effect on personal identity. A person once was brought up in a world or region where personal identity was a given. Because of urbanization people from different regions and religions come together. The person thus has to construct his identity from a plurality of traditions. Passages in life (e.g., marriage) that used to "connect" man and society are no longer stable. Berger (1993) comments that a person may be baptized a Catholic, marry a Jew, and be buried according to Protestant rites. Nowadays identities are more commonly reconstructed in the private sphere.

3.2 The Puritan "Inner-world asceticism"

One of the effects of privatization is that in the construction of the private individual the spiritual dimension is reduced or taken away. In the past the spiritual dimension or religious truth is intertwined with all areas of a person's life. It has practical implications in all facets of a person's life. The interesting question is to what extent this connection (the implications of religious truth on all aspects of one's life) is broken? The question is how much are our actions and attitudes motivated by our faith?

Max Weber has coined the term "inner-worldly asceticism" to describe a "total life ethic," an entire system of values, attitudes and beliefs about human conduct. Using this framework Hunter (1987) carried out surveys on Christian college and seminary students to gauge their view of spirituality. Specifically he explored their notions of work, morality, and self-identity.

3.2.1 Work

The starting point of the Puritan concept of work is very much related to the Reformation rejection of the dichotomy of human affairs into the sacred and the profane. The nature of the work, if it was to be for the glory of God, is not important. Hence, one can serve God by mending shoes just as in preaching the Word. Work which was legitimate carries divine approval. The general calling of God was salvation in Jesus. The specific calling is one which "assigns people to their tasks. In this view, work ceases to be impersonal . . . its importance does not lie within itself; work is rather a means by which a person lives out his or her personal relationship to God" (Ryken 1986, 27). This notion was reflected in the writings of English Puritan Richard Baxter. He seems to have carried it a little further when he says, "Hard physical or mental labor was a meaningful ascetic technique which helped one resist temptation" (Carden, 1990, 150). Conversely, a slothful attitude could indicate an unregenerate heart. Carden cites Weber that it was not labour which has intrinsic worth. Rather "what was of greatest importance was the rational, systematic, methodical, disciplined labor of a specific calling, without which the accomplishments of a man are only casual and irregular. . . . He spends more time in idleness than at work." This legacy of asceticism left a deep mark on the West.^{iii[3]}

What Hunter (1987, 54) has found in his study of evangelical college and seminary students is that they share a similar ethic of hard work. Hard work "is a good builder of character" or that "being productive in life and making a constant effort in a chosen field are among the most important qualities of life." What is noteworthy, however, is that the rationale for such an ethic are things like "a sense of independence and personal freedom, purpose in life, and self-fulfillment," (the so-called "affective" self-fulfillment needs), and "need for friendship, love and affection, and even marriage" (the so-called "affective" interpersonal relationships needs) (Hunter, 1987, 56). What is clear is that the theological significance of working in one's calling has diminished or disappeared. The spiritual significance is no more there.^{iv[4]}

I am not aware of any similar study in the Singapore context. Christianity in Singapore does not have such a long history to trace any changes in the work ethic. Furthermore, we do not have a direct link to the Puritan tradition. What is happening in Singapore is the ceaseless desire to upgrade one's job. The flourishing Masters' programmes by distance learning industry, and industry's persistent problem with job hopping, even amongst Christians, speak volumes. It also shows somewhat the desire to belong to a more desirable job category which is tied to earning power. Sometimes there is an equation between a desirable job category with high earnings and spirituality. It would be very interesting to survey the churches to see the percentage of such professionals in leadership positions. To be fair, such people are usually more capable and more likely to have leadership qualities. Nonetheless, the values which Paul marks out for the office of elders and deacons (2 Tim 3 and Titus 2) are mainly spiritual rather than gifts and abilities.

3.2.2 Morality

Christians have always maintained the connection between right belief and morality. The consequence of such a belief is that there are boundaries or limits as to what a Christian can and cannot do. There is a theological justification in making such a demand. The difference is between that of "godly living" and "licentiousness." It was the desire to establish a new commonwealth separate from the "evill and declininge tymes" that prompted many of the Puritans to leave for a new England (Carden, 1990, 27). It was a similar sentiment which prompted the believer to "separate" himself from the world and not be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers and "their habits of life" (Hunter, 1987, 57). The Christian believer was supposed to be different and conform to such standards as a sign of his commitment within the Christian community.

It may be worthwhile to point out that what these standards were is not the issue here. Some of the views may be cultural. James Hunter has conducted surveys on the view on morality of college students. He polled student's views on a range of subjects which include smoking, dancing and drinking alcohol. The results of his surveys were compared with earlier surveys in 1961 and 1951 (1987, 58-59; but see p. 260 for a discussion of the reliability of comparisons). For example in 1951 46% of Christian college students felt that attending "Hollywood-type" movies were morally wrong. In 1961 the figure was down to 14%. In 1982 no one maintained this view. In fact in 1982 only 7% of Christian college students felt that attending "R" movies (somewhat equivalent to Singapore's "R(A)" movies in terms of sex and violence) was wrong. On an anecdotal level Singaporean Christians leaders of the previous generation or two would discourage Christians from going to the cinemas. Some would even discourage the watching of television.

In 1951 98% felt that the drinking of alcohol was morally wrong but only 17% felt likewise in 1982. Even the percentage of students viewing pre-marital sex as morally wrong dropped from 94% in 1963 to 89% in 1982. The only "stable" result was extramarital sex which dropped from 98% to 97%.

There are two noteworthy points. Hunter cites the remark of one student who had this to say about such activities: "These things could be sinful if they become an obsession but they are not intrinsically wrong." In the past the reason for the Puritan condemnation was that they were "worldly conduct." The second point is related in that the reasons for speaking out against such practices have also changed. For example, in the 1950s the virtue of total abstinence and the *moral* problem of the consumption of alcohol were often argued. In 1980s the argument seems to have shifted to the *social* problem of alcoholism. Similarly pre-marital sex was roundly condemned as loose morals but in the 1980s the focus was on "appreciating the human vulnerability to sexual temptations and why yielding to them was wrong as well as how to responsibly deal with those people who have sinned sexually (including unwed mothers)" (Hunter, 1987, 62). In other words the stark and harsh tone regarding what is sinful was gone.

One can argue therefore that the traditional idea of worldliness has gone through some changes. The earlier generations would understand the need for boundaries to separate worldliness from holiness. To do so you need to maintain an exclusive standard for the group. It did not matter that they were ostracized for their stand. Indeed, the term "fundies" was used as a pejorative term to refer to the "fundamentalists." They felt that there was a moral authority for keeping such standards. The boundaries were clear. The later generations would generally maintain similar standards, since some standards like adultery and fornication are clearly laid down. Now there is a greater degree of inclusiveness. Either because of, or as a result of such a compassionate tone, more are added into the fold. The tendency is for the boundaries to be blurred. Hunter argues that there is less social cohesiveness as a result. He notes that

Sin is being redefined. What had once been morally intolerable is now quite acceptable; what had previously been a cause for exclusion from Christian fellowship does not even call attention to itself. . . . Clearly some norms have not changed. Evangelicals still adhere to prohibitions against premarital, extramarital, and homosexual relations. But even here, the attitude toward those prohibitions has noticeably softened. . . . Even the words *worldly* and *worldliness* have, within a generation, lost most of their traditional meaning.

How this plays out in Singapore remains to be seen. Perhaps we can look at the area of divorce. As more and more Christians are divorced and as the church reaches out to these people, will there be a time when even divorced members would be accepted as leaders of the church? In 1960, before the Women's Charter came into force only 20 divorces were recorded per year. In 1978 the number went up to 668, and then to 2023 in 1988 (*Straits Times* 27 February 1990). The figure for 1992 has gone up to 2565. The reader may wish to note that of the figure of 2565, about 280 (or roughly 11%) are Christian. As the number of divorces increases and as a proportion of them are Christian, it would not be too far off the mark to foresee a time when members and church leaders would be more inclined to soften their stand on divorce.

3.2.3 The concept of self

One of the hallmarks of the Puritans was self examination. There was a concern with the spiritual exercise of searching oneself as a process of the modification of the self. In the words of Packer (1990, 24) the Puritans knew "the dishonesty and deceitfulness of fallen human hearts." They responded by cultivating "humility and self-suspicion as abiding attitudes, and examined themselves regularly for spiritual blind spots and lurking inward evils." This is certainly not the same as the "irrational, emotional romanticism disguised as super-spirituality" which Packer describes as rather morbid and introspective. Rather "this discipline of self-examination, followed by the discipline of confessing and forsaking sin and renewing one's gratitude to Christ for his pardoning mercy" is "a source of great inner peace and joy." There is a difference between motivating the self in the pursuit of greater holiness and Christlikeness and self-examination for self-fulfillment.

One can describe the latter as a narcissistic search for self-understanding and self-fulfillment through the paradigm of an evangelical faith. This trend plays out in the multiplication of means to meet these needs. Basically the rationale behind such an attempt is to be relevant. Hunter (1983, 93) notes, in a review of publications of eight major publishers, that a significant percentage deal with "emotional and psychological complexities of human experience from an Evangelical perspective." He adds that one of the underlying question is "Who am I?" One may note that this question is in line with the modern need to construct one's self-identity because of the dislocation of the individual. In the past the individual knew his place. It is always a given (Baumeister, 1986). Hunter cites a book where the author invites the reader to "explore yourself and to know yourself perhaps more deeply than you have explored or known before." Some interesting titles of like nature mentioned by Hunter are: *The Art of Understanding Yourself; God's Key to Health and Happiness; Mental Health: A Christian Approach; Psychology of Jesus and Mental Health*. Another trend which is very much a reflection of society is the concern for mental health, counseling and therapy; hence, books like: *I Want Happiness, Now!; Defeating Despair and Depression; This Way to Happiness; Feeling Good about Feeling Bad; Relax and Live Longer; How to Win over Worry*. How different is this from the modern narcissistic concern for the self and hedonism? The broader culture of hedonism is epitomized by the phrase "If it feels good, do it." Some of the titles which reflect an attempt to meet such a reorientation are: *Self-love; Happiness: You Can Find the Secret; How To Be a Happy Christian; The Gift of Joy*.

One should note that Christian literature does not necessarily promote narcissism or hedonism. It may simply be that the authors hope to meet such a need in modern man, arguing that in Christianity one can find fulfillment too. On the other hand the constant exposure will definitely have the effect of encouraging such a mindset. One is reminded of the argument put forward by the media that they do not influence society but merely reflect it. There is a certain truth in this statement. The bottom line is ratings. If the public does not buy the paper or watch the programmes they will be withdrawn. On the other hand, as argued in sections 1.2 and 1.2.1, the media does have a profound impact on society.

Other scholars have noted that people are concerned with the quest for power. This culture is reflected in the Church. Some advocate "power ministries," "power evangelism" and "power healing." Horton (1992, 14) notes that there is a popular group of Christian weight-lifters traveling in the US breaking blocks of ice, chairs, and tearing phone books in half "as a

testimony to their central gospel: Christ as a power-source." Predictably, the group is called "The Power Team." If we look at this concern for power in the past we see a vast difference. Power in the past was used to win the struggle over sin, guilt, and the egoistic self. Today it is used for power to be switched on or off. One suspects that the underlying motive in the desire for power is dominance and gain (c.f. Parker, 24-26). The priority is pleasure, comfort, soothing experiences. J. I. Packer calls it, in another book, a hot-tub Christianity (1987, 53). Christians would move to another church whenever there is a problem. They are tempted to play a game of spiritual merry-go-round. We see the innumerable rounds of seminars and conferences on topics which are well-attended. People end up like "spiritual butterflies," sucking nectar from any available flowers, but forgetting that spiritual growth comes from giving oneself and investing in a local ministry of the church.

From the above discussion on work, morality, and the understanding of self we see that a lot of the religious motivation has been cut. What motivates the Christian may be personal fulfillment rather than a clear connection with the faith that he believes in.

4 Pluralism and its effect on spirituality

In the previous section we have already discussed privatization. It is one way of dealing with the monopolistic claims of religions or value systems. The other is *pluralism*. This word has several meanings. Carson (1993) lists three distinctions. One is pluralism as fact. We live in a pluralistic society where different religions and culture co-exist side by side. The second is pluralism as a principle of toleration. Hence, it would be folly to suggest, in the case of Singapore, that there should be one state-religion. A certain amount of civility has to be maintained otherwise society would be torn apart. But the danger is that this willingness to be civil may become a habitual mode of thinking which leads to the third type of pluralism: pluralism as a philosophical stance. We are talking about a mindset. Perhaps another word that can describe it is relativism. Allan Bloom (1987) laments the existence of cultural relativism prevalent in American society. An attempt to arrive at the truth would be regarded as dogmatic. Because of the numerous competing claims to truth, one response is the "knee-jerk reflex" in thinking that intolerance and absolutism are to be avoided. One result of this reflex is an indifference to knowing, "letting us [to] be whatever we want to be, just as long as we don't want to be knowers" (Bloom, 1987, 41). He distinguishes this from "the openness that invites us to the quest for knowledge and certitude." The former attitude stunts the desire to know; the latter makes every serious effort to know. He argues that one should have convictions. He calls these, facetiously I think, prejudices.

Prejudices, strong prejudices, are visions about the way things are. They are divinations of the order of the whole of things, and hence the road to a knowledge of that whole is by way of erroneous opinions about it. Error is indeed our enemy, but it alone points to the truth and therefore deserves our respectful treatment. The mind that has no prejudices at the outset is empty (1987, 43).

The second attitude seeks to correct the mistakes and tries to be right, whereas the first thinks that you can never be right and, as such, it is not worth the bother.

Such a philosophical pluralism affects one's attitude to tradition or heritage. This attitude prevents or inhibits one from trying to reflect on tradition or the past with the view of contextualising it for living in the present and for the future. In the Christian world, especially in

Singapore, we have many denominations and traditions existing side by side. Singapore Bible College, along a stretch of Adam Road, is a neighbour to the following institutions: Trinity Christian Centre (Pentecostal tradition), True Jesus Church ("charismatic" Seventh-Day Adventist), Adam Road Presbyterian Centre, and a mental hospital. It is not surprising therefore for one to adopt a position of agnosticism or relativism with regard to one's denominational tradition vis-à-vis others. Very often one does not know or would not even bother to identify denominational distinctives. The result is the increased likelihood that one's beliefs and practices become a curious mixture. This can be seen in our worship services where songs of praise are usually chosen not because they contribute to the rubric of the worship service but because of their popularity. At best we have a "buffet" mentality in the way we worship. At worse we end up in doctrinal error. The reader is recommended to read Warren (1986, 137) who comments:

I am convinced that congregations learn more theology (good and bad) from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear. Many sermons are doctrinally sound and contain a fair amount of biblical information, but they lack that necessary emotional content that gets ahold [sic] of the listener's heart. Music, however, reaches the mind and heart at the same time. It has the power to touch and move the emotions, and for that reason can become a wonderful tool in the hands of the Spirit or a terrible weapon in the hands of the Adversary. Naive congregations can sing their way into heresy before they can realize what is going on (1986, 137).

One may say that there is nothing wrong with a buffet mentality but there are two possible dangers. First, one danger is that in the process of "picking the best" one is too often tempted to discard that which is not *personally* helpful. Os Guinness (1993, 83) makes a point in connection with the megachurch's penchant for change. There is an explicit commitment to change and innovation. As such what happens is that when changes are made things are swept away without a thought. Guinness' response is to cite the typical reformer's response, "If you don't see the use of it, I won't let you clear it away. Only when you come back and say you do see the use of it, will I allow you to clear it away." He further notes that "we are more morally and culturally short-sighted than we realize -- and more foolish than we like to admit. . . . If something new is emphasized, something old is overlooked" (1993, 83).

The second danger is the possible loss of consistency in one's tradition. Each tradition has its own logic and consistency. Take away the logic or consistency and we lose our distinctiveness. What do I mean by consistency and logic? One good example is the distinction between revelation and the Quaker's "Inner Light." The Quakers waited for the Spirit to speak in and through them and to them. To them Inner Light was just as important as Scripture. At the beginning this group was rejected by both the Puritans and Anglicans alike. Interestingly, modern-day descendants of this tradition, like Richard Foster, are welcomed by the Evangelical world. I *do not* mean to say that Richard Foster is a heretic. Indeed I find many beneficial insights in his works and have recommended them to others. But what I *do* mean is that there is an entire edifice that may be at variance to ours and that we should think it through. One example is the *Renovare* Spiritual Formation Groups. One of the aims is the encouragement of renewal in churches through the instrumentality of Spiritual Formation Groups. One method is having a "well-balanced diet and exercise." This is achieved by recognizing that there are five traditions (the contemplative, the holiness, the charismatic, the social justice, and the evangelical

movements), each of which has strengths. Stephen Foster, in the Foreword says, "I like the balanced vision. To be baptised into the great streams of Christian life and faith helps to free me from my many provincialisms" (Smith, n.d., x).

4.1 I appreciate such efforts in marking out the contributions of different spiritual traditions. There is also a measure of truth when Foster says that a balanced vision helps to free one from many provincialism. Yet there is, in my opinion, a down-side. In the first place diversity reinforces the perception that the search for consistency in one's tradition is not important. One can after all take what is good from another tradition. Yet the danger is that the believer may end up having a buffet mentality leading to practices or theologies which, at the very root, are antithetical to one's tradition. Applying Bloom's logic there is a difference between knowing the strength and weaknesses of your tradition, and not knowing anything about your background. For the latter, the danger is that you are not anchored firmly and will be tossed and turned by every whim of the moment. I see the Christian world being buffeted by many new fads and happenings. Very often believers are at a loss as to how to react. One solution is go back to the roots, reflect and reformulate them to modern times. What I am suggesting is, again borrowing from Bloom, an openness to seek greater understanding. It is the quest for the strength of one's tradition but at the same time seeking to know its weakness in the face of other traditions. The one who does not have any knowledge about or interest in his tradition is susceptible to every and any attack.

The key and the difference is basically that of discipline and application. It is the discipline of inquiry and the search for the truth. Taking one's tradition for granted may breed complacency. There is no place for complacency or sloppiness. I would like to argue that if we are sloppy and complacent about our own tradition we would probably be sloppy and complacent in our attempt to engage with the world. As argued in my discussion on the definition of spirituality we need to apply all our creative energies to engaging society. McGrath (1993, 130) cites the analysis of John Waterhouse, an evangelical writer, on the crisis facing evangelicalism in Australia.

Ten years ago, I felt we were on the edge of an evangelical renaissance in Australia, a flowering of biblical scholarship that would touch secular society at its point of need and lead Australians to a new awareness of their creator. It even had a name: 'a theology of everyday life' or 'incarnational theology.' We got out some books that seemed to do the job . . . but then they stopped.

The cause, according to Waterhouse, was "a loss of spiritual energy, originality and creativity." McGrath puts it colourfully, "evangelicalism has become lazy. It has borrowed other people's [spirituality]." Discipline and application help us live for the future and maintain a continuity with the past. This mingling of the classics with the modern, to borrow Alister McGrath's comments (1991, 17) on Reformation spirituality, makes us "well placed to address the needs of our own day and age, where a consciousness of modernity is often tempered with an awareness of the need for stability and continuity with the past." Only when we seek our past and acquire from it understanding will we have a greater sense of self-identity: who we are, how and where we come from, what and why we are doing what we are doing. Understanding these would protect us from being complacent and stunted in our inertia. These were the same forces which led to a moribund theology and church ripe for the Reformation. At the same time our understanding of the past would serve as a foil against change for the sake of change. Indeed the

past is another window to how things were and might well be. History is often the best critique of the "common sense" of the present. "The past must be allowed to question our own presuppositions, and above all our natural tendency to suppose that the ideas, practices and values of our own time are somehow better than those of the past" (McGrath, 1991, 20).

4.2.1 But the reader may raise the question: Isn't a small group like, such as the Spiritual Formation Group, for example, the best way of going back to one's denominational roots or tradition? After all, there will be a discussion of one's tradition, and a discussion of other traditions. Current research of small groups suggest otherwise. If anything, it reinforces the pluralistic mindset. This ministry is very popular in churches today. In the 1980s, "house groups" was the buzz word, a ministry patterned after the successful movement of Paul (now David) Cho Yong-Gi. Now in the 1990s it is "cell-groups." Wuthnow (1994), has completed a massive study of the small group phenomenon in the United States. About 40% of Americans belong to groups ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to prayer fellowships. Small groups are also changing the "spiritual landscape" of the country. What is interesting and relevant about Wuthnow's study is his conclusion that small groups have generally succeeded in revitalising the church. They have also encouraged people to be "more interested in their spiritual development" (1994, 20). Yet Wuthnow sees some problems. First, they do not necessarily solve the problem of secularism.^{v[5]} There is the misconception that small groups can revitalise faith and perhaps help as a bulwark against secularism. Can small groups stem the tide of secularity?

"The deity of small groups is a God of love, comfort, order, and security. Gone is the God of judgment, wrath, justice, mystery, and punishment. Gone are concerns about the forces of evil . . . interest in heaven and hell. . . . The small group movement is currently playing a major role in *adapting* American religion to the main currents of secular culture. Secularity is misunderstood if it is assumed to be a force that prevents people from being spiritual at all. It is more aptly conceived as an orientation that encourages a safe, domesticated version of the sacred . . . a divine being is one who is there for our own gratification. . . . When spirituality has been tamed, it can accommodate the demands of a secular society. People can go about their daily business without having to alter their lives very much because they are interested in spirituality. Secular spirituality can even be put to good use, making people more effective in their careers, better lovers, and more responsible citizens. This is the kind of spirituality being nurtured in many small groups today" (1994, 7).

4.2.2 Second, the dynamics of interaction in the small group is not conducive to the search for truth. Rather the dynamics of the small group enhances love and caring for one another, the affirming acceptance of members, the conscious attempt to make Biblical truths applicable to one's lives. In the process a price is paid. Wuthnow cites the example of a member of a group with strong convictions on how rich Christians should behave and referred to some as biblical imperatives. But members of the group offered their own personal applications and in the process weakened the force of these imperatives. "Before long, each member of the group was feeling better. Imperatives had been transformed into personal opinions. The biblical imperatives were not only palatable; they were downright comforting" (1994, 201). The form of spirituality seen in small groups helps people feel better rather than challenging them to move beyond their present situation. It "inoculates." Wuthnow says, "At one time, theologians argued that the chief

purpose of humankind was to glorify God. Now it would seem that the logic has been reversed: the chief purpose of God is to glorify humankind" (1994, 18). This reversal happens because the concern of small groups is not usually truth or goodness but how to help us get along in life. Members are the judge of its worth. In the past there was the concern with truth, creeds and doctrines. Now this is not discussed.

Another phenomenon is also not helpful to the inquiry of truth. Groups have certain taboos on "cross-talk" which prevent different opinions from being challenged. A person can read a paragraph or a Scriptural passage and make a comment about what he thinks it means and another person can make an absolutely contradictory comment and nobody will say which is right or wrong (1994, 201). The result is an exceptional level of tolerance for diversity.

4.3 At the end of the day the direction that a small group or cell group takes would depend on the leadership of the local church. If the leadership is firm in pursuing its distinctiveness and truth and influences the direction of the small/cell group accordingly, then members would grow in that direction. But if the focus of the church is on ministering to the practical needs of members, or using small groups as a means for church growth (Wuthnow, 1994, 349-352; see also Hiebert, 1993, 72-73) then the problem of pluralism would not be solved. Wuthnow argues that small groups are not a panacea for all the problems of the church. Indeed if we want to revitalise the church while maintaining the discipline of inquiry it would be wise to take the suggestion of Wuthnow that churches adopt a "broader multipurpose programme" which does not entail small groups necessarily being the principal activity of the church. Such a broader multipurpose programme brings "opportunities for learning, worship, and service as well as fellowship" (1994, 363-64).

5 Rationalization and its impact on spirituality

5.1 Another aspect of spirituality is how the self is cultivated, transformed, or changed by way of holiness. This is the motivation to attain new spiritual heights. The two are related. One's understanding of himself as a Christian will motivate him to aspire to greater holiness. There is a connection with the practice of spirituality with another facet of modernity -- that of rationalization. Sociologists talk about theoretical rationalization and functional rationalism. The former relates to the field of science and philosophy. Its effect on Christianity is to pressure theologians to translate their faith in terms of natural science and philosophy, to "demythologize" theology. God is progressively "shrunk." Others may develop a "siege" mentality, withdrawing from social interaction. Functional rationalization refers to the use of rational control (meaning bureaucratic or management methods) to run all the spheres of human affairs.

The effect of functional rationalization on the running of the church can be profound. In the area of church leadership it means the application of management principles to the running of the church. To a certain extent, and since plans have to be made, this is essential. But how does one draw the line where faith comes in? What is there to stop Christian leaders from using such tools as a means to bludgeon the pastor or chairman into resigning just as the CEO is dismissed if unacceptable losses are incurred by the company? What is there to assess the spirituality of a church except the growth it has enjoyed? How would churches judge mission boards sending missionaries to areas which are hostile to the gospel and where there are no results to show for? As a result, management methods have affected the practice of Christian spirituality

Hunter (1983, 73-84) has studied the evangelical practice of spirituality and how functional rationalization has affected it. He lists three facets: first, the conversion process; second, prayer and the Quiet Time; and finally, the practice of witnessing. He notes that the effect of modernity is the increased tendency toward "systematization, codification and methodization." This, of course, is paralleled in marketing and the effect is that of "mass production and widespread distribution and consumption while maintaining a high degree of quality control over the product." I summarize his findings below.

5.2.1 The conversion experience is systematized into specific steps, even though most methods state explicitly that there is no "tidy little formula" One example is Billy Graham (1977, 167-78), First you must recognize what God did: that He loved you so much He gave His Son to die on the cross. Second, you must repent for your sins. It's not enough to be sorry; repentance is that turnabout from sin that is emphasized. Third, you must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This means that you cease trying to save yourself and accept Christ without reservation. Fourth, you must confess Christ publicly. This confession is a sign that you have been converted. (1977, 167-78).

The Campus Crusade model is somewhat similar. It is enshrined in the "Four Spiritual Laws" Law One. God loves you, and offers you a wonderful plan for your life. Law Two. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life. Law Three. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life. Law Four. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives. . . . Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us the kind of people He wants us to be. (Bright, 1965).

In other words the conversion process is codified and systematized. Once this is done the next step is to create training programmes and materials to teach such methods to the faithful so that the conversion process is replicated. Finally the process is mass produced and seminars are organized for churches.

5.2.2 The second facet of spirituality is prayer. Here again there is codification, systematization and methodization. One good representative is the Navigators. The *Seven Minutes with God* puts the practice of "Quiet Time" in a very neat package.

Lets put these seven minutes together:

- 1/2 Prayer for guidance, Psalm 143:8
- 4 Reading the Bible, Psalm 119:18
- 2 1/2 Prayer: Adoration, 1 Chronicles 29:11; Confession, 1 John 1:9; Thanksgiving, Ephesians 5:20; Supplication, Matthew 7:7

7 minutes

Another example is the popular resource for "quiet time" *Our Daily Bread*, published by Radio Bible Class. One of the reasons why such a book is popular is that everything necessary for a Quiet Time is conveniently packaged. Each day there is a set routine where one would read a page from the booklet. A Bible verse is conveniently printed on the page, together with the thought for the day, and some appropriate verses from a hymn or a poem. There are no questions asked of the reader and as such he can read the page rather passively and consider this as his quiet time. It is so convenient that the booklet can be read "on the run."

5.2.3 The third area is evangelism. Here again the rationalization is evident if we look at some of the organization methods. Hunter (1983, 81-82) gives the organizational levels of *Evangelism Explosion*.

1. Prayer partners
2. Trainees
3. Junior Trainers
4. Lieutenants
5. Assistant Lay Teachers/Trainers
6. Teachers/Trainers (lay and staff)
7. Leadership Clinic Administrators
8. Leadership Clinic Teachers.

Hunter argues that with such a structured hierarchy multiplication is easy as it enables uniform standards to be maintained. One can say that the primary goals are replication and quality control, which is similar to that of corporate organizations or business franchises.

5.3.1 The first impression that one gets in reading Hunter is that he is too negative. The ministry of these organizations has made it possible for Christianity to grow, for Christians to adhere to the faith, for people to be socialized into a community where they are nurtured and strengthened in the faith, and for Christians to be mobilized. These Christians have a significant impact on society. Sng (1993, 286-88) speaks of the significant contributions of parachurch organizations in Singapore. One can argue that when you are "in the battlefield" you do not have the luxury of reflecting over the niceties of the methods.

Indeed, some leaders of organizations have already begun the process of self-evaluation. Jim Petersen, for example, makes the following statement in the very first statement of the first chapter in his book *Lifestyle Discipleship. The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today's World*: "THIRTY YEARS OF DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAMS, AND WE ARE NOT DISCIPLED." Petersen notes that their goals "were to live as disciples of Jesus Christ and to multiply their numbers until they filled the world." Yet he is now asking the question of whether discipleship can meet the challenge of modernity (1993, 16).

It is therefore in the spirit of contributing to the process of self-evaluation that I that I have highlighted Hunter's points and make the following remarks.

5.3.2 There are problems brought about by functional rationalization. The first issue is philosophical. There is a profound effect on spirituality when we use modern management techniques. Management techniques are not neutral. They bring a new mindset while at the same time undermine the old. Postman (1993, 13-14) speaks of the profound changes on culture as a

result of technology. His analysis is applicable here. He gives the example of the common practice of assigning grades to students' examinations. This is so natural nowadays that we do not think twice about the significance. This practice, which began in 1792, was a step in constructing a mathematical representation of reality. Nowadays "psychologists, sociologists, and educationists find it quite impossible to do their work without numbers. They believe that without numbers they cannot acquire or express authentic knowledge" (1993, 13). Postman argues that "to say that someone should be doing better work because he has an IQ of 134, or that someone is a 7.2 on a sensitivity scale, or that this man's essay on the rise of capitalism is an A- and that man's is a C+ would have sounded like gibberish to Galileo or Shakespeare or Thomas Jefferson (1993, 13)." To Postman modern day assessments make sense to us but not to the ancients because "our minds have been conditioned by the technology of numbers so that we see the world differently than they did." In other words each tool or technology has a predisposition to create a new mindset with a different set of agendas. "To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number (1993, 14). It is in this context that Postman cites Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism, "The medium is the message."

If management techniques are applied in the way we run the church it would appear therefore that a new set of agendas would be in place. The question is whether these agendas would be appropriate or effective in making an impact on society and deepening our spirituality. Let me use an example from society. From the efficiency point of view one good way of making sure a traffic policeman is doing his job is the number of bookings he makes on errant motorists. Some may even be tempted to think that this can be a criterion of a successful road transportation policy. Now one can put up a fairly good case that fines and demerit points have a deterrent and salutary effect. Because motorists are deterred from speeding, accident rates are likely to be lower. (In the United States there was resistance to the change of speed limit from 55 miles per hour to 65 mph on interstate freeways because studies show that there is correlation between greater speeds and higher rates of accidents). But no one would argue that the number of bookings, or for that matter other enforcement measures, is the only criterion of success in road management and safety. Such an approach would be reductionistic. It offers only a partial solution. Motorists still cause death through accidents not attributable to speed. Similarly, a systematic approach to the conversion experience, prayer, and witnessing may be successful, but it may not be the end all in one's spiritual pilgrimage. Hence, each management tool has its intended effect and unintended consequences. A person has to start with some basic knowledge of the Christian faith. Convenient and practical steps in growth is certainly invaluable. The danger is in thinking that everything that needs to be done can be reduced into easy steps.

5.3.3 The second problem with functional rationalization has to do with choice. Christians, like consumers, have a choice in the use of materials. We purchase Bible Study resources or Quiet Time materials from a supplier. We have a choice either to buy or to use one set of materials in preference to another. This is related to the notion of managerial rationalism, mentioned as an aspect of modernity. People choose the ministry they want to be involved in just as, the more cynical would say, they choose products in the market-place. Organizations must "sell" in a way which will attract Christians. However, as we have seen earlier in the example of the media, the element of choice has a profound effect on society. With regards to television, one effect is that

viewers tend to have a short attention span. The presence of choice, enshrined in the TV remote control, only exacerbates this effect. The same situation will happen to those using materials which are easy to digest and require only a passive mind. Some time back, *Christianity Today* (24 October 1994) printed an advertisement for a resource for children with the caption "How do you turn a minute into a lifetime?" The materials is entitled "*One-Minute Bible 4 Students.*" How will the children turn out in life? Some important truths can be reduced to a page or a few minutes of reflection but there are profound truths which required more intense mental energy and a focused mind. People talk about the instant-food mentality in the pursuit of the spiritual life or in spiritual growth. There is, in my opinion, a direct link between this mentality and the age of show business.

5.3.4 The third danger of functional rationalization is the unintended consequence on the pastoral ministry. The ministry has undergone a dramatic shift in terms of its paradigm. It is quite usual nowadays to view the pastor as some sort of a Chief Executive Officer. The traditional image is a shepherd who leads by *being* who he is, warning his flock of the dangers ahead, and rescuing those who may be in trouble. Now if the pastor does not measure to the *performance* requirements of the church he may be fired. There are other minor but telling signs. A manager is constantly in contact with his customers and his subordinates. So pastors must be in constant contact. As a result pastors carry pagers and/or hand phones. CEOs are answerable to the board with their performance. It is a numbers game. Therefore we see the increasing tendency of pastors putting in a number just for the sake of plugging a number in their annual plans. CEOs are assessed for their aptitude. As such there is an emphasis on improving vocational training. Just as people get their MBAs, so pastors upgrade to a DMin or go for specialized skills.

Because the pastoral paradigm has shifted from *being* to *doing* the pastoring is more likely to be focused on church growth and other performance indicators. Having some form of accountability is good and no one should hide behind spirituality ("leaving results to the Lord"). Yet the danger is the excessive concern with numbers which at the end of the day destroy the faith that we ought to be nurturing. This is the paramount concern of Guinness in *Dining With The Devil. The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity.*

6 Is there a solution?

Thus far I have discussed the effects of modernity on spirituality as seen in privatization, pluralism, and rationalization. What is the solution? Can the effects be mitigated? I think that if there is one way it is through *discipline*. Simply put a *spiritually* disciplined Christian is probably better equipped to say no to the temptations of life, and the challenge of discerning the needs of the hour. But this seems to be somewhat out of fashion nowadays. One of the problems that we have to deal with is the traditional antithesis between law and grace.

6.1 There are several opposing tendencies as far as the attitudes to these disciplines are concerned. On the one hand there are those who argue that the disciplines are the hallmarks of spirituality and godliness. After all the apostle Paul told Timothy to train or discipline oneself for godliness (1 Tim 4:7). One finds books teaching such disciplines and extolling their virtues. On the other hand there are those who deride such disciplines as legalism. Like the Pharisee such practitioners often end up showing how much more "spiritual" they are than the other. A far better way is for the discipline to come naturally. A third group may feel that the practice of the

disciplines often leads to a situation where the Christian merely "cultivates his spiritual life." Christianity becomes in effect a privatized religion, something which we have just highlighted.

The above-mentioned second group who criticize these methods as legalistic argue for a freedom from the commitment which constitute the very distinctive of the disciplines. Nonetheless, unbridled freedom is not the solution either. We fool ourselves if we think that a habit of practising spiritual graces will come automatically. It will only come automatically if it is *embedded* in the personality. Richard Foster remarked that "the playing of Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique* is easy to the accomplished musician who has labored until it flows out in his very body language; but until then it is difficult, painfully difficult" (1981, 8). We may argue that such discipline or standard is legalism. There is some truth in this, just as there is some truth in the criticism of the Puritan's concept of spirituality. Yet we must bear in mind that there is a tension between the outward expression and the inner reality. Without the outward we may be just licentious in our behaviour. Without the inward we can become hypocritical and no different from the Pharisees. After all, did not Paul tell us that we are free in Christ? Yet there is a paradox when Paul tells us in the "next breath" that we should not allow freedom as an excuse or an occasion to sin (Gal 5). Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns us of the danger of "cheap grace" if we do not hold the correct balance between freedom and obedience. He writes "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes" and argues that we cannot separate the two (1959, 69-74).

The third group has a point when it says that the focus on spiritual disciplines often results in a privatized Christian who is busily concerned about his spiritual walk while the world passes by. Again, there is a certain truth in this charge, especially when the Christian stops just at the cultivation of the spiritual disciplines. The goal is godliness. This godliness is centred not on the self but on being able to detach oneself from the lure of the flesh. I am not arguing for a life of asceticism but for the freedom from the temptations of the trappings of this world. Singapore in the 1990s is a society driven by the desire to accumulate wealth, specifically the accumulation of private properties. Christians live in this world. To be able to "detach" oneself from this world may mean the ability and the courage to say that he has sufficient wealth. This detachment should be so embedded that one should be able to overcome such doubts and temptations. If we cannot, and to the extent that Christians suffer from such a desire to accumulate wealth, our witness will be affected.

Perhaps it was the strength of Eric Liddell's conviction that caused him to make his decision not to run on that faithful Sunday in 1924 because he believed in keeping the Sabbath (Whitney, 1991, 9), a decision immortalised in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. But I would be surprised if Liddell did not agonise over the decision or if the decision had nothing to do with the "training in godliness." Such was the impact of his conviction that even after forty years people are still inspired by his actions. When Allan Wells of Scotland won the 100 metres dash in the Moscow Olympics in 1980, he said, "That's for Eric Liddell" (Whitney, 1991, 9). To effect a transformation of society we need to be transformed personally. To do that we ought to have a realistic way of effecting personal change, taking care not to deify the method.

6.2 The practice of the disciplines, I believe, has the secondary effect of training the mind in the habit of discerning, weighing, and reflecting on issues which may have serious implications

on living as a Christian. He is less likely to go for the quick and easy way to fix his problem, which is often a superficial answer. This habit goes a long way in redressing the negative impact of the "show business" mind. But there is more than just redressing the negatives. We "enter" Christianity in a given social framework. We are "born" into a family associated with a Baptist, a Methodist, or some other denomination. Or we are converted into a Pentecostal, a Presbyterian or an Anglican communion. Each of these communities has its own ethos, distinctives, history and tradition. We practice the spirituality in the context of those traditions. Sometimes we are associated with such a tradition because it is the only one we know. On the other hand there may be a choice. We may be attracted by certain features in a particular tradition.

Yet, if you think about it, there is no "choice" after a choice has been made. This is so because once a person is "socialized" into any society he will find that it is not so easy to break off from this mold. In this sense he needs to transcend the ethos or the culture that he is in. In order to do so a person must possess strengths and capabilities. These come after years of training. During the time of Martin Luther it was quite likely that many people felt the same misgivings as Luther regarding works, grace and salvation. One example is the critic Erasmus. Scholars have noted that late mediaeval exegetes like Nicholas of Lyre and Hugh of St Victor had already shown signs of a break from the dominant allegorical type of interpretation of the day (Preus, 1969). These late medieval exegetes went back to the scriptures and propounded a literal reading of the Bible. But Luther transcended the culture that he was brought up in, whereas Erasmus died a Catholic. One certainly needs a spark of genius to break the barrier of "the given." But training and discipline were needed to articulate that glimmer of a spark into a coherent picture. He needed the critical ability to read the Bible in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. These come not from a short QT with God every day, but from a long time of work and study. I am not saying that a person must study Biblical languages. Before the Reformation the Bible was generally only available in Latin, with some manuscripts copied in the original languages. Now Bibles are easily available and translated into many languages. The discipline that may be relevant now is a habit of subjecting society to critical awareness. This comes from a study of social science, history, and theology. Indeed, Mark Noll notes that the Reformers like Luther and Calvin emphasized the necessity of education. Similarly, the Puritans "were equally insistent upon a comprehensive engagement with learning" (1994, 59).

It may be interesting to note that if one is brought up in the context of a particular ethos he may not even have access to the whole counsel of God. If the daily diet he gets is a dose of some spiritual snippet he may not be reading the Bible in its entirety or even whole books of the Bible. Now, each tradition stresses different aspects in the Bible. Luther was reputed to have rediscovered the doctrine of grace when he read the Psalms. It is very plausible that one would go through the motions of religion without being conscious of how much the tradition that he belongs to has departed from the revealed Word. It is in this context that I used Amos at the very beginning of the paper. The prophet Amos (5:18-20) noted that his contemporaries' understanding of the Day of the Lord is completely off the mark. They are like a man who fled from a lion only to meet a bear, or as though a man comes home safely and rests his hands on the wall only to be bitten by a snake. The Day of the Lord will not be a time of light but of darkness and judgment. This is the danger confronting any age in Christendom.

6.3 The above discussion starts with the individual effort of facing the problem of a privatized Christianity. There are other avenues. One must not forget that Christians are called into a community. This means that the Christian does not cultivate godliness alone. Rather he belongs to a community which supports and reinforces his values, mentality, and approaches to dealing with the challenges faced in the world. The early church was able to revolutionize the ancient world because people were willing to train themselves to be godly while at the same time being associated with communities. Although I have dealt with the negative aspects of small groups and how they reinforce pluralism rather than combat it, the impact of a correct understanding of community that is alive and open to God's working can be tremendous. This idea of the community is beyond the scope of this paper and will be dealt with by Wayne Johnson.

6.4 One would be forgiven the impression from reading this paper that there is a general tone of pessimism. Christianity has been too much affected by the force of modernity. I recognize the impact of modernity. This is a challenge to Christianity. If anything one result is an environment which is much akin to the early church. Scholars have noted the fact that the problem of pluralism, one of the attributes of modernity, is not new (Carson, 1993, 42). The early church was socially located in a very pluralistic environment. That did not stand in the way for the early church in making its impact and inroads. They did not hide behind the "cultural" crutches of belonging to a "Christian culture" but instead they got down to work. We can and must do likewise. It does mean that the church needs to be more creative in her apologetic task. Jacques Ellul (1986, 33-39) argues that the early church was an "explosive ferment calling everything into question in the name of the truth that is in Jesus Christ." The irony or the tragedy was that when it became the state religion of Rome it lost this impetus and indeed restored pagan "culture," the legends, the deities, the spirits, and the pagan world-view.

We should also understand the fact that secularization or modernity has not resulted in the shrinking of faith. Indeed, religion may flourish. The sad thing is that faith may have accommodated. Sociologists like Berger have pointed out that despite the increase in knowledge, people have become more credulous. Sociologists do not just write off religion as a thing of the past. The challenge of modernity is indeed very real and serious. It is not insurmountable. The first step is to recognize the danger of modernity. By God's grace we can meet it. My solutions for meeting the challenge of modernity is not new. It is basically the same prescription but the rationale is contextualized within a new framework -- that of modernity.

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Endnotes

^{i[1]}It may be noted, however, in the 1990s, especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union or perhaps contributing to its breakup, there has been a rekindling of tribal and ethnic consciousness. This trend does not seem to be confined to the former Soviet Union.

^{ii[2]}See Christopher Lasch (1979) for a more profound analysis of the change in mindset in a market economy which resulted in increased consumption. J. I. Packer, in an article on leisure and life-style (1993, 356), has noted that western society since the Second World War has grown affluent and promotes "spending rather than saving, self-indulgence rather than self-improvement, and amusement at all costs." In another article (1987, 45-70) he laments over the consequences of such a hedonistic mentality for Western Christianity. It "bends holiness out of shape, and . . . has a very tight hold on our priorities."

^{iii[3]}The irony is that even though Protestantism's ascetic philosophy is antithetical to a luxurious lifestyle and to self-centred gain Protestantism "freed capitalism from economic tradition" (Lyon, 1987, 39). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss how much Protestantism contributed to the rise in capitalism.

^{iv[4]}The reader may be interested in following an analysis of this change by Lasch (1979, 52-29).

^{v[5]}Note that privatization and pluralism are components of modernity. Modernity as we have discussed is sometimes referred as secularism.