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Abstracted from Paul Pierson. "The New Context of Christian Mission: Challenges and Opportunities for the Asian Church" (in Ma, 18-28).

The thesis of this chapter is that the church is being reshaped in ways unprecedented since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The traditional, institutional churches in the West are decline while in Africa, Asia, and Latin America they are still growing. Though Pierson is writing for the Asian church, he is clearly thinking of the growing churches outside the West. In the midst of the decline of the traditional (institutionalized) churches in the West, newer churches are emerging. Pierson indicates that studies of these newer churches have yielded certain common factors:

1. "Most evangelism and nurture of believers takes place in cells of five or ten persons who meet weekly in homes" (19). Pierson observes that these groups are similar to the Puritan conventicles, the Pietist ecclesiolae, the Moravian choirs and the Wesleyan class meetings. He notes that the modern Protestant missionary movement was birthed from these movements; and that such small groups played a key role in every major revival.
2. Most of the newer churches are not "classically Pentecostal", but are open to all the gifts. There is greater focus on the ministry of the laity.
3. "Normally, there is an extended time of grazing prayer. A worship team, using contemporary music, and sometimes composed by the group, leads the praise" (20).
4. "Often these churches have their own training programs, but they are for those already in some form of ministry. That is, ministry comes first, then sometimes more formal training" (21).
5. "Along with the emphasis on praise and prayer, there is strong emphasis on the exposition of Scripture" (21)
6. "Often these churches are remarkably holistic in their ministries" (21).
7. These churches seek to remove that which they believe alienates the younger generation (hymnbooks, organs).

Pierson cites Don Miller's assessment of what these churches have in common:

There is a profound experience of God  
Lives are transformed.  
There is a strong sense of community.

***To what extent can we consider "characteristics in common" as an accurate reflection of church health?***

Pierson indicates five issues to be faced by these newer churches:

1. Since most were started by charismatic leaders, transition to a new generation of leaders will be difficult.

2. The need for substantive theological reflection.
3. Will they be able to develop structures to maintain growth without degenerating into stifling bureaucracies?
4. Will they maintain the high level of commitment into the third and fourth generations?
5. Will they be able to adapt their communication methods to the next newer generation?

Pierson presents two major areas of opportunity and challenge for the church's mission:

1. The new Evangelical Ecumenism, which Pierson began with the Lausanne Conference in 1974. "I believe that Evangelicals are now more functionally ecumenical than the World Council of Churches (WCC)" (23). Evangelical ecumenism is more concerned about world evangelization.
2. New mission centers are becoming prominent: Former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, multi-ethnic Western cities, Post-Christians in the West, the Muslim world.

***What have we observed as mission agencies have moved into these new mission centers?***

Finally Pierson offers three critical issues for the future:

1. The most crucial missionary frontiers are the cities of the world. "Every country, without exception, is urbanizing rapidly" (26).
2. Grassroots leadership has been a major factor in the growth of churches worldwide. The emerging issue is the development of these leaders in ways that do not create a ministerial elite.
3. "Finally, as we confront the opportunities and challenges in mission today, we need to realize that mission has always come out of renewal, both personal and corporate" (27).

***An eminent church history professor in Canada (Ian Rennie) once commented that the renewal of the church in the West would come through the mainline churches. Pierson does include the mainline churches in his comments about the decline of the Western church. In light of his observations, what are we to make of Rennie's assessment?***