

Good morning, brothers and sisters. My name is Barbara Moreira, I am a Regent College and Artizo Alumina. Thank you for your presence here in the first Learner's exchange of this school year. It is a beautiful day, and I am happy you all choose to listen to me talking for 50 minutes. I hope you all enjoy. It is my pleasure to be here with you today to talk about two things I really love to talk about: Linguistics and Applied Theology! Today I will present to you a research that I made with all my heart during a course at Regent College called Missional Church. It is something that burns in my heart and I could actually use my knowledge in Linguistics to do this research.

So, the focus of this talk is the **church in North-America**. So, when I say Church, please have in mind the geographical specificity that I am referring to.

We live in a pluralistic, globalized, multicultural and secularized society. With globalization, immigration rates have increased, and as a result, so has cultural diversity. This fact has challenged the urban church in North America to stretch itself beyond its comfort zone and *to* be more open to cultural diversity. Different cultures live with the reality of constant culture clashes that accentuate the distinct narratives that constitute each culture. In this reality, the Western North-American church had to adapt to be more suitable to this new society. Consequently, North-America went from Christendom to practical atheism over the years.

Different cultures living together meant that individuals would be formed from different languages and narratives. So, today I will argue that **language is powerful in shaping the way we see and understand the world**. In particular, **I will concentrate on narratives**, lenses through which an individual or a community sees

the world, and how they shape us. They are powerful; and **changing the main narrative of a group could take years.**

My thesis is, as you can see in the handout, is: The church in the secular **world is dying** because it is not missional, and it is not being missional because **it is not living under the narrative of the Gospel.** Instead, the main narrative that shapes the church nowadays is a **psychological and individualistic one.** Therefore, the answer to this problem of a dying church with an unproclaimed gospel is to change, or to shift, the narrative that is leading the modern church to the living Gospel narrative, **in order to become intercultural.**

This is in **direct opposition** to the homogenous unit principle defended by Donald **McGavran** in the 1970's. He argued that in order to have successful church growth, the leaders of the church should keep **the church as homogenous as possible** because it is more likely that people will group themselves within the same kind of people, **whether** socially, linguistically, **or** ethnically speaking. Today, I will make a case that **in a secularized environment, the church is called to follow an intercultural narrative rather than a homogeneous narrative.**

In order to explain myself here, we need first to get some definitions done. I will first explain Mission, Mission of God, and Missional Church (I put them under Mission). Second, I will go through what I called Linguistics terms: Language, Metaphors, and Narratives. Then, I will develop my thesis linking theology and linguistics: changing the church narrative and becoming intercultural.

Now, I choose the term INTERCULTURAL and not CROSS-CULTURAL, or MULTICULTURAL (that's a famous and loved one) on purpose. See, I understand

Multicultural as being in a shopping mall, full of different kinds of stores, and nobody actually mingling to know more about the different. They know there are different stores selling different things, they live respectfully together, but they don't actually spend time trying to know the other stores and products. In the same manner, for what I see, Cross-Cultural situation and community, people assume there are different cultures around, they live respectfully, there is actually a temptative of knowing more on the other cultures, BUT, it assumes a dominant culture. So, there is a little mingle, but they are still under a dominant culture and by the end of the day, if a minority wants to survive in this context, it has to know and learn and adapt. Whereas the dominant culture gets to know more about differences, but never actually let it shape and reshape their own culture and manners. Multicultural and Cross-Cultural are both completely okay and noticeable in our society. I bet you are imagining a situation or two where you saw this. And the phrase: "as long as we respect each other, everything is fine!" is like a mantra here in Vancouver. However, we are talking about church here, and being the Church of God goes beyond everybody living respectfully in their own square, or having a dominant culture that some of the individuals try to mingle with the visible minority.

That's why the concept of Intercultural is important. It does not assume a dominant culture. It assumes that every culture has something good to offer, and something bad. It assumes that, in a Christian narrative context, that we need to learn with each other, and teach one another, in an equal matter. In an intercultural narrative, everybody is equal and trying to learn together and to grow together. So, this is the main point today: **to be an Intercultural church in North-America.**

Now, let's move to the definitions I need in order to discuss the means to change a dominant narrative in a church. The first definition that I believe needs to be done is on what does it mean when someone, anyone, says Mission, Mission of God, and Missional Church. It all looks a good lingo, that we should know, but it is good to have that clarified. I will try to do that today.

I know that when someone in a pulpit says Mission, the first thought would automatically be about transcultural mission, or overseas missions. Mission goes beyond that or any church program devoted to mission trips to a 3rd world country. I like Christopher Wright's definition of mission:

Mission is the committed participation of Christians as people of God, together in God's mission, being aware and belonging to the history of God's world, to the goal of the creation's redemption.

Let me repeat:

Mission is the committed participation of Christians as people of God, together in God's mission, being aware and belonging to the history of God's world, to the goal of the creation's redemption.

The author also says that it starts in the inner movement of God. Bosch says "**Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God.**" For Orlando Costas, a latin-american theologian, **mission should be understood under the incarnational lenses.** He states the importance of Christ's death to humankind, saying that **it was through the incarnation that humans start to grasp what is the mission of God's people.**

In sum, Mission of the church can only be understood after we understand God's mission, so we can actually do mission as His people and as one body. Therefore, mission is the *TELOS, or Purpose*, of the Church (and here I refer as the whole catholic and apostolic church).

To discuss **mission** apart from **Trinity** is inadequate and incomplete; as Bosch states, mission should be put in the context of Trinity **and not ecclesiology**. The theology of a missional church is linked to the theology of *Missio Dei*, or as Hastings puts it *Missio Trinitatis*. A trinitarian approach for the mission of the church helps the church to see itself as **an instrument of God in God's mission, as Guder puts it**. The term *Missio Dei* says God is a missional God and he **has been in mission since the creation**.

On the other hand, Hastings says that *Missio Trinitatis* says the triune God is a relational God, and that the commissioning is a great encouragement for the church. **"It is a consequence of our union with the triune God in Christ (theosis) by the Spirit." (as the author puts it)**. In other words, we participate in the mission of the triune God, **through the God incarnate** Jesus Christ, **and** by the power of the Spirit of God. Hastings points out why this is encouraging, saying that **now** the church is sent to the world **empowered** by the **sent** God. A trinitarian approach to mission points to **a relational and personal characteristic of the Mission**.

God is three in one. Since we were made in His image and **likeness**, the relationality and personal part of our human character comes from this relationship the Trinity has in itself. A **trinitarian** approach to the mission of God highlights the relationality of God, thus it offers a narrative for a postmodern world which suffers from

loneliness and meaninglessness. The metanarrative of the Trinity with humanity **as** the image of a relational God is the first step to the thesis I am developing in this paper. More on that on the definitions of Narratives.

Now, knowing that God is three in one and that he is relational is not exactly defining his mission on earth. The term **mission of God** shows a "personal, purposeful and goal-oriented" God; and analysing the narratives of creation, the reader can see the commitment of **God to creation** and the covenantal characteristics, as Christopher Wright said. God's mission, according to Wright, is to restore creation "to its full original purpose of bringing all glory to God himself and thereby to enable all creation to enjoy the fullness of blessing that he desires for it." It is a redemptive mission to the whole creation, and we, **as His church**, are invited to participate in God's mission.

So, we have so far **mission, trinity, and the mission of God**. Now pass to the definitions of the mission of **the church** and, more importantly, what is a **missional church**.

First, it was stated **earlier** that the mission of the church is to participate in God's mission of redeeming the whole of creation. But **practically speaking**, how can this be **done** and what implications does it have to the Western postmodern **church**?

Paul Stevens defends the point that "church does not **'have'** a mission; it **is** mission."

In other words, if the mission of God is to redeem creation, **the church is the means by which the triune God is completing this mission in the world**. The church is made up of the people of God, clergy and laity, and it is one people **reflecting** God's mission **in** the world, sent by the triune God.

With all the definitions made, a **missional church** is the one which has as the *telos* to fulfill the **mission** of God.

Guder states that the characteristics of a missional church are compassion, justice and peace of the reign of God, **and** having the Holy Spirit as the main distinctive characteristic. A missional church is not formed by selfish human intentions and efforts, but by the empowering presence of a triune and relational God. It lives **by** the incarnated Word, that is Jesus, and **as a result, intentionally** lives an incarnational Gospel; and because of its incarnational characteristic, it is also inculturated, or at least, it is constantly seeking to be. It is not disconnected from the world, but it tries to understand the culture and society in order to fulfill God's **mission** in the world. It is also **practical and wise**, and **listens** to the problems of the people that are part of the church, ALL OF THEM. It is also patient, knowing that the path that the whole creation is going through, the path of redemption, is a long and narrow one. It also acknowledges that the **mission** is **God's**, and we, as people of God, participate in **His mission**.

This narrative is important to set the tone of **who is in charge**, **emphasizing** that no **human** is the owner of a ministry or church. A **missional church** is also **heterogeneous**, meaning it has people from different genders, social layers, academic and social backgrounds, etc. It **listens to the voices of those who are usually marginalized**. It **gives voice to the voiceless** in the society by listening to them. A **missional church expresses** *shalom* and hospitality. In John 20:19–23, we see Jesus sending his disciples. Hastings writes about this passage in his book, emphasizing in chapter 1 the trinitarian characteristic of this sentence. In the same

manner, we, as the church of Christ today, are sent by Christ, through the Holy Spirit, as God sent Jesus to be one with humanity. A **missional church** is in constant movement to understand the sentness of the church to act in the world.

Thus, to be **missional** a church should first and foremost be **trinitarian** and incarnational, living the sentness of God in participation with the humanity of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; **and second**, it should **understand the narratives that are shaping the world**, inside and outside the church walls. The narrative of the Gospel should be **the one narrative** that all those who believe in the Incarnated God live under.

Ok. So, so I made my definitions on mission and missional. Now I will move to the linguistic part of this talk. I will start with Metaphors, Discourse and Language, Narratives, and Culture. Then I will show why it is important to know these for my argument! I hope you are all still here with me.

Why Language? Well, as I see, Language is God's gift to humanity. And it is an old topic among Western Philosophers. **Although all animals have a way of communicating with one another, human beings are the only species in the world who can speak.** Human language is complex and structured.

Think about this: God created the universe by **speaking**, and Jesus was the incarnated Word. Language is important to talk and discuss theology in any level. Barth developed a philosophy of Language, because he saw the importance of Language **in** the relationship between God and humans, **and** human knowledge and the nature of the Trinity. Wittgenstein and Derrida also developed, separately, a

philosophy of language because they understood language as the key to see the world.

Indeed, it is of great importance, since language gives meaning to knowledge, and knowledge **goes together with the reality of the world**; thus, as the theologian Charles Taylor said, "beliefs about things are **constructed**; they result from a synthesis. (...) Language plays an important role in this construction." In other words, Taylor says language is important because **it is the means we construct, elaborate and express knowledge of concrete and abstract things**. Guessabi, a Linguistics Scholar, makes a point on arguing about the relationship between language and culture, saying language is culture, and it marks **cultural identity**. The author argues, using the linguistic relativity principle, that "the way in which we **think about the world is directly influenced by the language we use to talk about it.**"

The linguistic relativity theory was coined by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, and it is also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The most important thing it says is **language shapes the way the speakers see and act in the world**. Wardhaugh, another Linguistics Scholar, develops this hypothesis, pointing that it is the structure of a language that determines worldview; ergo, **culture is reflected in the language spoken by the individuals**.

The movie *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve, is a good example of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The learning and using of a new language with a completely different structure brought the character played by Amy Adams a new way to see the world. Although this movie is fictional, the premises of language relativity are well applied and a good example for my thesis.

Ok, so let's move to Metaphors. The definition of metaphors is important to explain the reason why this talk was titled "Narratives We Live By." The name of this presentation is a reference to Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By*.

They show metaphors not only as a **poetic** device, but as having the power to **shape the way a speaker sees the world**. Can you see a theme in here?

Language dictates how we interpret our everyday engagement with the world, without being even aware of it. The authors use the example of the metaphor of war to talk about love, passion, and success. (I will conquer her heart) It may seem that the way we communicate might be disconnected with respect to how we see the world, but Lakoff and Johnson argue that **metaphors and linguistic expressions are containers for meanings, and it conceptualizes our experience in the world**. **Therefore**, it is powerful to **uncover** the imaginarium of a civilization.

We experience the world; and the means by which we express it **is** through **language**. There are many **untranslatable words in the world**. In Portuguese, there is a **word** that **expresses** the **feeling of longing for something or someone which is missing or lost (SAUDADE. It is deeper than missing someone)**. In English, there are three words for vengeance: **vengeance, avenge and revenge**. This shows a people that was **marked by war** and felt the need to differentiate the nuances of **these words**.

The word choice to refer or explain something that exists in the world shows **how the culture and behaviour of the speakers is formed**. I **chose** the concept of narrative over the concept of metaphor because, although **metaphors show how language influences the way of thinking**, it **does not** carry the full **weight** of this affirmation.

It is a **first step** for a further discussion of how narratives shape our way of thinking and behaving.

Language-use assumes a common ground between the speakers so everyone can understand the speech. **This common ground is the term 'narratives.'** We learn in school that narrative is a way of telling a story. And what are the premisses of a good story or narrative? at least **one speaker and one listener**; a **main character** involved in some kind of incident; and it can be **formal or informal**. A narrative exists and **makes sense** because it assumes **a sum of cultural values** that the **reader / listener will understand**. The way we tell the story of David to a kid is very different to when we are telling the same story to a grown up, right?!

So, If language shapes the way we see the world, **narratives are the means by which we tell the stories that shape us**. Let me repeat: If language shapes the way we see the world, **narratives are the means by which we tell the stories that shape us**.

They model the way we create our memory and myths, and they can **shape and reshape the consensual rules of a given society**, as Donald said. Taylor defines narratives as a story that offers "**insights into causes, characters, values, alternative ways of being, and the like**." He essentially says that **narratives** are the stories that **cannot be told through science or atemporal generalization**.

Having **defined** language, metaphors, and narrative, **we** will now define culture, and then **show** the relationship between language and culture. So, carry with me!

When seeing the word culture, almost everyone thinks first about classical music, movies, literature, or a play. Andy Crouch makes a case for the multiple cultures in the world, knowing that usually we tend to use the term culture **in** singular, referring to different strings of **culture**, being that high culture, pop culture, or any other string. He notes that when one wants to study culture, he or she should understand the deepness and **the weight of each culture**. From our birth, passing through the history that formed our relatives, all the way to language and literature, **the formation of culture takes years**. It also takes time **for a human being to learn to live in a given culture**. We are born into a culture, **neither by our own choice**, nor inherited genetically.

On the task to define culture, Crouch says it goes together **with what it means to be human, since "culture is what we were made to do."** He goes on to say that culture is a result of **what humans make of the world**, understanding also that it is not all that we do that shapes culture

If metaphors, narratives, and culture shape human beings, what **is** the greatest difference **between** them? Although Crouch make a big case about culture being basically the **lens** through which we see and make sense of the world, I believe narratives shape culture, or cultures. **Metaphors are one way, and the most visible way, in which narratives are used to shape us**. Culture goes together with language, and narrative. In fact, Fatiha Guessabi says that a division between **language and culture is hard to make, because language is culture itself**. Since language carries many cultural traits like the behaviour of the society and its customs, a clear link between these two is easy to make. Elmes agrees with

Guessabi saying: "it does appear that the structure of a language determines how speakers of that language view their world."¹

Therefore, **language shapes worldview**. On this matter, language is a broader concept than narrative. **Language is culture**; narratives are **the stories that shape us**, as I stated above.

We will now go to the third part, where **narrative will be linked to theology**, showing that it is possible to change the **narratives** that constitute a community, and the church should constantly review which narrative it is living by.

This is the third and last part of it, where we can all see the reason why I had to define and discuss so many things! Remember that I said in the beginning that this talk today will focus on a new view for the church in North-America? So, we will now go back to this.

On writing about religion and narrative, Geertz **states** that narratives shape our identity and have the power to change our consciousness. He also defines religion **as the cultural system that serves to promote interpretation of the practices of our existence by communicating the ideas in a social way**. He defends the idea that not only **are narratives** important in forming the human character, but among the many narratives that exist in the world, **religious narrative is one of the most important for the task**. If narratives have this power of molding the worldview, **with religious narrative being** one of the most powerful ones in a society, and if the Protestant churchgoers (who define themselves as Christians) all lived under the

¹ Elmes, 13.

narrative of the Gospel, **then their worldview and praxis should reflect, in a mimetic way, what the narrative of the Gospel teaches.**

But what is the narrative of the Gospel? It is a narrative **of lament, redemption, and reconciliation.** It is a narrative of **equality and inclusion.** It is a narrative of **respect and hospitality toward other cultures.** It is intercultural.

To sum up **this narrative of the Gospel, (and because it is Sunday Morning, so we should read a Bible passage, right?!) I will use the words of Paul to the Galatians 3: 26-29:**

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3: 26-29. NIV)

Paul was dealing with a dispute between **Jewish** and **Hellenistic** Christians regarding the practices of the Law and Jewish customs. He concludes chapter 3 saying we are **all children of God**, and **in Him** there is no ethnicity or cultural background that is more important **than the fact that we are His children.** I simply Love this passage and message. It is very powerful.

Paul was showing here a good example **of changing the narrative of a community.** Actually, reading the Bible we see the story of a people that is being challenged in their narratives constantly. Smith and Carvill show the progression of the people of Israel in their path from **the** Old Testament to knowing the incarnated God and forming the church in the first Century **in the New Testament.** At

Pentecost, we see **diversity** and the Holy Spirit **empowering men and women regardless of language and culture**. Those men and women had one thing in common: **the narrative of the Gospel**. It was more powerful than any other possible story that formed them. From Babel, where God confused the languages, to Pentecost, the narrative is of a God **in mission to forge** a relationship with **His** creation, and **who** desires to redeem them.

We are called to be **disciples of Christ**, practicing what **he taught** in our society and to ourselves. Being a disciple of Jesus is to be drawn into living a life ruled by the Word, that is Christ.

Practically speaking, changing the narrative of a secular age **requires a radical change, inside-out**. The story the Gospel tells us is about redemption and acceptance. Christ died **on that** the cross to save us. On the cross, we were **reconciled with God and to each other through an act of salvation that came from the Incarnated Word**. Christ taught the disciples about a life in community, loving one another, and forgiveness. The teachings and practices that Christ **taught** are powerful to bring together **individuals and communities that would normally be marginalized by one another**. Let's exemplify this with a practical and visible example for anyone who lives in Vancouver. The ethnical churches.

In **North America** there are many different cultures **co-existing in the same city, the Multicultural society that North-America is brings it**. It is a logical consequence that **the** many cultures **will** group together in communities. One of these communities **is** the ethnic church.

For example, let's take Asian and Americans. Jacob Young writes a study on the power of the Gospel narrative in the Korean culture living in America. He argues that there are **fundamental psychological features when an ethnic church is planted**. One of the greatest issues is **ethnic over racial**. Another one is **generational**: English Ministry and Korean Ministry (or second and first generation ministry). Ethnic churches are a reality in North America, and it is visible in Vancouver, BC. Just go for a walk in your neighbourhood.

The issues, primarily the generational issue, that the author points out are problems that **all and every single church** will face. With ethnic churches, it is possible to see the narratives that brought them together to become a church: **immigration**, different country, adaptation, need for belonging, homesickness, **and language**. Aside from language, **all the other narratives are common to any immigrant in North America**. The beauty of the narrative of the Gospel, reflected in an **intercultural** missional church is **that** they will **love** one another and be **family to one another**, in the name of the Triune God, because **this is what the narrative of the Gospel teaches us**.

Scripture teaches us to deal with lament, and the immigrant in a new country is lamenting to a degree. It could be as soon as he or she gets to the new country, or after a few months. **The reality is so many ethnic churches exist** in North America **because the new immigrants do not feel they belong to any other community**. The narrative of being in a new country and their culture **carries more weight** than the narrative **of being part of the family of God**. The existing church did not lament with them, or **try to see** their worldview. I would say that this is partly because they

were **homogeneous monocultural from a dominant culture**, and did not know how to take the first step. This is partly because **they were trained to see the world only with their own narratives**, and partly because of the **language barrier**. It is indeed **more comfortable** to be among people that completely understand the specifics of what it means to be an immigrant in North America from your country.

Ethnic churches are the perfect communities for **first-generation immigrants**. They are loving of one another and hospitable, and it is possible to be in a **monocultural** church and still be **missional**. However, the **main narrative** of an ethnic church is **culture and language**. To be called disciples and followers of Christ, the Christian church **must** be aware of the narrative that is leading them. What is the narrative forming the Christians in the secular society?

Brenda Salter McNeil defends the imagery of Witness of the Gospel as being a **superior** narrative to Christians than any other, thus bringing together people from different cultures, language, and **transcending any historical background**. Being as such means having no idol, **not even the culture**. When Paul says in Galatians that "in God there is not Jew or Gentile" he makes a **powerful** statement on culture, Gospel and the redeeming love of God. **No cultural traces should be superior to the teaching of Jesus for us.**

A **missional church** has in mind the power of narratives, the possibility to change them, the recognition of mistakes, and the need for forgiveness. Being intercultural and heterogeneous means to see the other **as equal, regardless of language, race, gender, social status, or education level**. This is mirrored not only on the way the members of the church behave inside and **outside** the church building, but

also in how the **board of the church is formed**. A church who claims to be **missional** and lives under the narrative of the Gospel, but has a board made **up of** only a single ethnicity and gender in a **multicultural city** like Vancouver is using the wrong words to define themselves. On the other hand, having a great variety of race, age, and gender, but the same social and academic level can also be homogeneously non-representative. In summary, and I hope you are all still following me here, being missional means being concerned about the **people that belong** to your community, **particularly in regards to** the narrative that forms the basis between them and **you**. Do we have a dominant church culture? Does the dominant culture give voice to the marginalized? Ideally, there will be a point where there will be **"neither Jew nor Gentile"**, but only the children of God.

We are shaped by the narratives that form us. Language and culture are part of what make us individuals with our personalities. We are the product of a creative relational God in Mission to redeem the creation. It is a narrative so powerful that is able to transcend **any cultural** and language barrier. As image of God, we are relational too, meaning we are not **to live alone in the world**; we need one another.

In the secular age, the narrative of individualism is growing each day more and it is the **main narrative that governs the western North America**. People are living each day more focusing on the **self** and to fulfill each **hedonist desire** that lives within. Nevertheless, this age carries a great rate of **depression and suicide**, among Christians and non-Christian, as we all know. The **secularism narrative** is killing the world God created.

A church who has the Gospel narrative as her main narrative would not **conform to such a world**, but would live to **transform** it. The thrust for the transforming grace and presence of God would be so great that the consequence would be **a relevant church**. However this is not the current reality of North America. Actually, the secular narrative is **palpable** in the life of the church. As an institution, the church is also becoming **psychological and triumphalist**, which can be said is the how churches are hedonist.

It is an **arduous** task to change the narrative of a church community, but it is possible. Tim Dickau exemplifies in a good way a form to pursue it in a **practical** manner, and I quote him:

moving (1) from isolation to community towards **radical hospitality**; (2) from homogeneity to **diversity** two words shared life among cultures; (3) from charity to **friendship** towards seeking justice for the least; and (4) from the confrontation of idolatries to repentance towards new life in Christ.

There is a crisis in the way ecclesiology is being practiced in North America, and the diagnostic is: **it is not Missional**. The way to start to walk in a different direction is to pay attention on the **narratives that are forming the imagination of the community**. The path to transform a fragmented and secular church is long and weary. To change the forming narrative of a community is difficult and challenging, but it is **rewarding**.

Being Missional as a church means being **intercultural**, learning the ways to make **sense of the world** each culture and ethnic group brings to the church to the point

one day there will be **no labels necessary to communicate to each other** (i.e. using race and cultural background as way to refer to the other: "the Asian girl;" "the Brazilian family"). To be able to transcend these labels and let the church be transformed again regardless of them is one step forward to be Missional and fulfilling the mission of God on earth.

I invite everyone that is listening today to evaluate the narratives that are forming their communities and whether they need to be changed. If they do, know that it will take time to change it, but in the end it will be a piece of heaven on earth.

Thank you very much.