

February 2024
DUPC Sunday Forum Series
Sundays, 9:45AM—Shaw Room

Beyond Resistance

The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World

by John Dorhauer

**Come join the discussions of this thought-provoking book led by
several members of the congregation.**

***Beyond Resistance* presents a call “to move the institutional church
out of a modality of denial and into a perspective of hope.”**

**Copies are available to loan.
contact David Lee for more information.**

February 18th and 25th

John Dorhauer's book
*Beyond Resistance: the institutional
church meets the postmodern world*
(part 2 of 4)

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Downtown United Presbyterian Church
February 25, 2024

Last week, Nancy Brown introduced us to this book, "Beyond Resistance: the institutional church meets the postmodern world." Today, we will delve a little further. What does Dorhauer see, or believe, or imagine to be an evolution of the Christian church – toward what he calls Church 3.0, or (as it were) a Christianity 3.0? We will need to acquaint ourselves and examine some of his theories. But even more importantly, we need to look – very honestly and critically – at ourselves: how do we fit into his models?

I think we can all agree on this: Downtown faces challenges related to membership and expenses. There is a vague sense that the energy and purposefulness of past years has gone missing. There is a sense that how we relate to one another might be better. And we certainly wish more people could come to worship with us. None of these challenges has simple solutions – certainly there is no single program or initiative that could change the realities. (Even Matthew 25: it is a goal, but it does not provide a process or mechanism.)

I believe that this is our reality: we are an older and aging, predominantly white congregation with a solid and beautiful building and a large endowment. But we are not attracting new members or new tenants fast enough to prevent the exhaustion of that endowment within the next decade.

Nancy tried to turn our attention away from "Is DUPC dying?" to a hope for resurrection – because that is how Christianity is: there is a Holy Spirit that can create new life always.

So, how do we maintain hope in and work for a resurrection of DUPC? And if a resurrection, in what form? (these are important questions for now; but we will have to find real answers if we are to avoid "dying.")

The Dorhauer book

John Dorhauer says:

- 3 reasons for declining church attendance
 - Declining birth rates
 - Costs of building maintenance
 - "Post-modernity"
- Grieving, Believing, Perceiving are steps to new hope.
 - Christians believe that death is not the final word. Resurrection is. So it must be with churches.
 - What gives DUPC hope?
- Churches are birthed for mission.
 - What does that mean?

Reading this book, we realize that DUPC's specific reality is similar to realities in other churches. Susan Orr reminded us that the Presbytery of the Genesee Valley expects that another ¼ of its churches will have to close in the next decade.

Dorhauer identifies 3 social and cultural issues that "explain" this reality:

- Declining birth rates
- Costs of building maintenance
- "Post-modernity"

We will get into what he means by "post-modernity" in a little bit.

We have a hope (and I want to believe it's not only wishful thinking) that Downtown can define and coalesce around a vision for a viable future. But Nancy last week also reminded us there is a process (necessary steps) to find new hope: and that process will involve Grieving, Believing, and Perceiving.

The church, this community needs to grieve losses and changes – those that have occurred and those that will occur. It will involve Believing that change can be managed: it will take wise leadership, participation and honest expression and listening: that eventually and somehow we can agree on what has to stay and what has to go.

And finally, she reminded us that Perception matters: that there is Hope and not despair despite the "realities." Dorhauer says that to be Christian means to believe that Death is not the final word: Resurrection is. Is that something we still or really subscribe to? The Perceiving will involve having faith that the Holy Spirit will not abandon the world or abandon the Church. It means finding a purpose and meaning, connection to something transcendent – these are essential spiritual motivations: purpose and meaning, connection

to something transcendent. Perceiving means to see beyond what we can physically see, or measure and count. Remember what Einstein is said to have said: not everything that matters can be counted. For the church, it means looking beyond membership and budget issues, to issues of Mission.

What are sources of hope for DUPC? What strengths and opportunities do we have?

Ultimately, Churches are birthed for mission. That is what Dorhauer starts with, what he reminds us to start with. It is an inspiring motto for The Church in general. But in our lives, it will come down to what does it mean for Downtown in particular? What kind of mission do we want DUPC to pursue, despite the declining numbers and the considerable costs of maintaining the buildings?

Dorhauer honestly believes that some churches will have to die (no longer have a physical presence), and for them the remaining question becomes ... how dignified can that death be? When membership and resources dwindle and are not replaced, will the church disappear without much of a trace? Or will there be a chance to preserve and send forth some kind of legacy– to pass on what it stood for, through either its money, its people, or its mission?

We will be called in the next few months to wrestle with these issues over and over and over again. There will continue to be losses to grieve, as we try to find consensus on what to give up, in order to commit to something else.

As someone said once in my life, in a completely different context, will we experience this time as Good Friday, or will we find hope and purpose as an Easter people??

What does that mean – to be rebirthed??

"Post-modernity" - what is that??!

Modes of thought

- ▶ "Pre-modern"
 - ▶ Classical, Medieval
- ▶ "Modern"
 - ▶ Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modernist
 - ▶ [Wikipedia definition]
- ▶ "Post-modern"

This struggle is more than metaphysical ideas. Dorhauer emphasizes in his book that a major reason for decline in church membership and participation is so-called "post-modernity." But what does *that* mean?

The term is very broad. It applies primarily to analyzing Western modes of thought – how Western minds perceive the world. We should appreciate his contribution, but we should also be careful to exercise some critical thinking of our own, too.

Dorhauer does not say much about "pre-modern" thought. I put this in here to contrast that with "modern." "Pre-modern" would generally include Greco-Roman thought, and then Medieval ways of seeing. Heschel in fact reminded us that it was only with Jewish theology that the dignity of all humankind was introduced, out of belief and understanding that mankind was created in the likeness of God. Jesus came out of that tradition.

And then the Western Church modified the tradition and codified a theology – as Richard Rohr has said, the Church changed it so much that it owes more to Neo-platonic thought (thought in dualisms) perhaps than to the Jesus' teachings and example.

Medieval thought – the best and brightest of their times – created a worldview that sought explanations of origins and purpose and meaning, and found answers that were hierarchical, stable, orderly by their standards. It was the world that created Church 1.0 – hierarchical, stable, orderly.

And we should remind ourselves also, there were concomitantly with medieval Christianity other viable metaphysics and worldviews including Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Aztec, indigenous ones, etc. The

impulses to make meaning and find explanation are remarkable, and apparently universal, human traits.

Perhaps the challenge of our times is that we do not have a global spirituality (ways to explain, motivate, inspire) to go along with our awareness of the increasingly global problems and interdependence that we have. Perhaps we are meant to contribute to our small part to that process.

Dorhauer describes "Modern" as the characteristic thought model of the past 500 years (in Western civilization at least). I think he rather lumps together the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods with 19th and 20th century post-industrial modes of thought. These were the centuries when technology and dissemination of knowledge created a sense that Science and Reason could lead to ever better lives for humankind. Even as it confronted the effects of industrialization, "Modernism" (by Wikipedia) was "a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve, and reshape their environment." It might be called an attitude that individuals and societies could cease to be "victims of history to become instead its creators."

So called "Post-modern" modes of thought began to take hold after the horrors of two world wars, the Holocaust, the atom bomb, totalitarian governments, and continuing now with climate change, etc.

Post-modernism questions its predecessors, both intellectual and spiritual. It asks, Is there really a benevolent God? Is the beauty of Shakespeare only relevant for Western Europeans? Is humanity really destined to improve, or might it destroy itself? Is gender really absolute? What are "objective facts?"

3 Statements about Post-modernity (Dorhauer)

Statement One:

- ▶ "Postmoderns do not believe that there is such a thing as universal truth; in other words, what is true for you may or may not be true for me."

Statement Two:

- ▶ "Postmoderns learn differently."

Statement Three:

- ▶ "Postmoderns do not trust institutional authority."

There are many implications of having a “post-modern” point of view. To keep it simple, for our purposes today, here are three generalizations that Dorhauer offers.

Statement One is “Postmoderns do not believe that there is such a thing as universal truth; in other words, what is true for you may or may not be true for me.” They believe that all knowledge is contingent on personal and cultural influences. There are no absolutes.

Statement Two relates to how technology has changed how individuals gather information and learn. No longer is it a teacher or authority figure, with a passive learner of lower status. The whole world of the Internet and social media are available. Postmoderns value that, do not want to give up on that.

Statement Three results from the first two phenomena. Institutional authority, based on hierarchical systems, would be objectionable in a view that denies the universality of any reality and prioritizes the importance of subjective experience.

Remember, he is saying here that regardless of what *you* may believe and how *you* may think, there are others with a Postmodern mindset. It has arrived and it is thriving.

So how “post-modern” are we or strive to be?

Is that you? Are you more post-modern or modern?

How will we relate to postmoderns? How do we respond to “I don’t believe there is Truth?”

What kind of role is there for the Christian church with postmoderns?

Church 2.0 and Church 3.0

Church 1.0

- Orthodoxy based on sacred scripture, sacred tradition, sacred authority

Church 2.0

- Authority from scripture alone
 - Faith and grace
 - Scriptural interpretations

Church 3.0

- Authority from ... what??



In this context of growing skepticism and mistrust of authority, Dorhauer posits, there would understandably be evolution of understanding of “church.” Here I believe he is referring primarily or only to the Christian church.

Church 1.0 (the pre-Reformation church) had three sources of orthodoxy: scripture, tradition and authority. But toward the end of the Middle Ages, trust in the system eroded. Indulgences, having 2 or 3 popes each claiming to be “infallible”, poverty and disease – loss of faith in Church 1.0 orthodoxy led to The Reformation. But Church 1.0 did not die or get replaced completely. For many, it is alive and it is well, not an anachronism. Scripture, tradition and hierarchical authority still matter to many.

Then alongside Church 1.0, there developed a Church 2.0. After centuries of bloody conflict, they have (mostly) learned to co-exist. Church 2.0 discarded unquestioning reliance on pope and priest, as well as many traditions and sacraments. This Church relied on scripture, faith and grace. Beliefs and practices could be varied (obviously, there are many Protestant denominations), but they shared those three foundations of faith (scripture, faith, grace).

Eventually, most Protestants also developed systems of ordination – systems of training, testing and authorizing clergy. As much as they might profess the priesthood of all believers, there was also implied adherence to practices and norms (liturgies), which varied by denomination but shared many other doctrinal similarities. And there was reliance on a professional clergy and a place to worship (sanctuaries as holy places).

Church 3.0, Dorhauer says, will reduce the roles of professional clergy, architecture and liturgy. Church 3.0 doesn’t trust or believe that Truth or knowledge or belief come from or depend on any of those sources.

Does that warrant discarding the structures? What are the Pros and Cons ...

Clergy in Church 2.0 and Church 3.0

Postmoderns:

- ▶ Do not believe in universal truths; learn differently; do not trust institutional authority.

Church 2.0 relies on:

- ▶ Professionalism, orthodoxy, ordination, organization, liturgy, hierarchy (often)

Church 3.0

- ▶ What will be the roles of clergy, of liturgy, of governance?
- ▶ Is this "heretical, vapid or insubstantial"?

Dorhauer tells us that postmoderns do not believe in universal truths; they learn differently; and they do not trust institutional authority.

Since Church 2.0 still relies on clergy to interpret scripture and conduct worship services, Dorhauer believes that that is a good explanation why postmoderns have begun to abandon churchgoing.

He says outright: to the degree that you do not find meaning and comfort in worship services as they are conducted in your church, you probably already are "postmodern." And I would suggest the opposite is also probably true: to the degree you do find meaning and comfort in the doctrines and structures of your church, you are not postmodern.

So what are we at DUPC, more 2.0 or more 3.0?

The institutional church is meeting the postmodern world, and the result is declining membership and unsustainable finances. More and more people are postmodern, and they aren't filling the pews. Does that mean that all churches will fail? Does it mean that mainline churches will disappear, to be replaced by some form of worship without clergy or liturgy or buildings? Of course not. We need to remind ourselves that there are churches (little c) that follow Church 1.0 (big-C) forms. Church 1.0 (Capital-C) does coexist with Church 2.0. So it is likely that both 1.0 and 2.0 churches will also coexist with Church 3.0, whatever form that takes. Christianity (Dorhauer is suggesting) is in the midst of finding new ways of being a capital-C Church.

Dorhauer does not have answers for what Church 3.0 (capital-C) might look like. But he does believe that it will have less role for professional clergy, set liturgies, systematic governance, dedicated locations. After all, it has to meet the needs of postmoderns!

Dorhauer in the last few chapters gives examples of 3.0 type churches that practice “Christianity” that is moved by the Spirit, without relying on clergy or liturgy; membership coming and going; meeting in different kinds of places.

Is that “heretical, vapid or insubstantial,” something too far out for us?

In the meantime, what type of church (little-c) will DUPC become? What mission and missions will it pursue? Who will we reach out to be its “members” – the unchurched, the postmoderns, the traditional?

How might we (DUPC) know if we are succeeding?

- ▶ If we keep doing what we are doing, we will get the same results?
 - ▶ Membership is declining.
 - ▶ Finances are unsustainable.
- ▶ And again, what is the mission?
 - ▶ Churches are not corporations. They provide for the spiritual lives of their congregants and the community.
 - ▶ How can these be measured?

In the meantime, is this church (Downtown United Presbyterian) succeeding, or is it “dying”? Clearly if we keep doing what we are doing, we will probably keep getting the same results. Namely, membership is declining; finances are unsustainable.

Is that how we measure our success or failure, by membership and finances?

It comes back to questions of mission. How is “going to church” the same or different from “being a church”? Is this a church where we go, or is this an organization that has a mission?

Churches are not corporations. They are different institutions altogether. When we think about DUPC, we realize that lives are affected – that’s why I keep coming back, and probably you also. Spiritual growth occurs through coming to these forums; through attending the sacred time and space we call worship; through listening to sermons, music, time with children. We

support non-profit organizations in this building, and non-profit organizations outside this building. We provide a safe space for people.

And yet none of these activities are reflected in counting heads or counting money. So, Dorhauer asks, How can we better measure the spiritual contributions of a church??

We can't abandon those measures (membership and finances) completely; we do need to acknowledge their usefulness, because they are objective. Finances determine what can be done. They somehow reflect "satisfaction" with the conduct of the church. They reflect what the community feels about the church perhaps. Membership translates into pledges. But they don't reflect everything a church is doing. They are necessary, but not sufficient to assess a church's health. Dorhauer encourages looking beyond membership and finances to measure the impact of a "church."

Four points about "metrics"

- ▶ Measuring membership and finances are necessary.
- ▶ There is no mission without some margin.
- ▶ Churches compete with other non-profits.
 - ▶ The world no longer relies on churches to coordinate social activities or charitable activities.
 - ▶ Members contribute to many other charities.
- ▶ New metrics are needed to reveal what churches are actually doing.

Dorhauer makes Four Points about "knowing if we are succeeding"

- Measuring membership and finances *are* necessary. It is not mercenary to be concerned. But it cannot be the only concern.
- There *is* no mission without margin. (We do not have a state-sponsored religion!)
- But, it is a tough fact, churches compete with other non-profits for attention and for money. The world no longer turns to churches for social connection or charitable activities.
 - Despite good intentions, most churches *can't compete effectively* with other churches and non-church organizations. Those activities hire professionals to do their fund raising and outreach.
 - Furthermore, clergy aren't trained for management, recruitment.

- And for many congregations church used to be a major venue of social connection. That is no longer the case.
- And finally, we members contribute also to many other charities, charities run by professionals who are clear about their mission, leadership, and management of for specific intentions.
- So, the old ways no longer work. Any rebirth will depend on answering, What does this church do?
- New metrics are needed to reveal what churches are actually doing. But new metrics for what mission(s)??

Dorhauer really wants us to change our perspectives. Focusing on membership and finances is important. But not if it neglects focusing on mission. The Church (capital-C) was birthed for mission. churches (little-c) are birthed for mission, too. He wants us to remember that.

Are we concerned about declining membership? Are we concerned about declining finances?

WHAT else does DUPC stand for, in these circumstances? (What mission is God calling us for?)

And do you have ideas for new metrics?

“New Metrics” = how do you measure success?

- ▶ “The Church is the Church when lives are changed.”
- ▶ How. Are. We. Of service?
 - ▶ Count THAT !!
 - ▶ “**** served” (McDonald’s model)
 - ▶ Weekly, 5 minutes describing examples of service provided, of “church in the world”
- ▶ “Whatever new growth is out there to be found is going to come from those who are not yet invested in and not yet committed to the Church.”

Dorhauer reminds us, The Church is the Church when lives are changed through it and by it.

How are we of service? [contemplate each individual word]

How has our religious orientation changed lives – ours and others’?

How have people benefited from our activities, and how many?

How have we served others, spiritually?

What do we do to bring (Christ's) love into the world?
As we claim to be Christians, are we known by our love?

We can describe this, we can even count it! Dorhauer's idea, like McDonalds, is to post how many people a church has served. And to keep it cumulatively updated ("DUPC has served ---,--- so far")! A tally might remind us, and motivate / inspire us. It would bring the Idea and the Experience of Service into better awareness. And also, perhaps occasionally / perhaps each week, someone could describe their example of service, of how they brought "church" into the world.

Dorhauer believes this type of authenticity – spiritual authenticity – is key: showing that spiritual motivation makes a difference. Ultimately its sustainability will need fiscal support. But meanwhile we can recall our mission(s) in the world and to the world; become more mindful of our spiritual roles, those roles that we are not paid to do, but are called to do.

Dorhauer believes "Whatever new growth is out there to be found is going to come from those who are not yet invested in and not yet committed to the Church."

But to attract or engage them, a church would need to focus on defining and pursuing its mission(s), collectively and individually.

So we return to where we started: A church is called to have a mission.
What mission is DUPC called for? How do we define OUR mission and live it?
Will we be more Church 2.0 or 3.0?
How will we include / accommodate / invite postmoderns?
How will it achieve that mission? How will it measure its achievements?
What will we have to give up to achieve "our mission"?

DUPC Sunday Forum Series: John Dorhauer's

Beyond Resistance: The Institutional Church Meets the Postmodern World

2-25-2024: David Lee

Attendees: Grania Marcus, Carol Samuel, Helen Ganotis, Marily Terpening, Sally Allison, Sam King, Lyle ____ (Quaker attendee), Kim McConnell, Raina Bouphavong, Joan and Bill Mackey, Matthew Swartz, Nancy Brown, Becky Parks, Mary Rees, Carolyn DeHority, Bob Carlisle, David Lee, Elaine Johnson, Nancy Simpson

Zoom: Kristin Hunt, Ed Saphar, Gail Mott, Marie Gibson, and Peg Meeker.

Discussion and questions:

- How post modern are we? How post modern do we want to be?
- How are we being of service?
- Collaboration with other faith communities: Spiritus Christi, the Quakers, UCC, PGV, etc....
- Perhaps our building could be a part collaborative mission, e.g. location, space, a gym, etc....
- Prophetic Imagination: Hope and the Holy Spirit; we are not doing faith work by ourselves.
- DUPC members have many "micro connections" with faith and the world.