

# Confidence, Communion and Calendar: Being Reminded of The Church's Great Mission and Opportunity

By Craig R. Dumont

On a recent Linked In article titled “Apple: Imitation is the Highest Form of Flattery,” Colin Shaw observes that:

Apple has created within their retail outlets an excellent experience. More like a club, Apple retail spaces have become a place for like-minded people to meet. They encourage you to get involved with the product and want you to touch the merchandise.

Now [Disney, Microsoft and Tesla](#) are all imitating this unique style of interaction in their retail spaces. They want a little of what Apple’s got and so they are taking their cues from them. They have also designed “experiences” for their customers as well, and all of these companies are raising the bar on what a retail store should be.

The story is that the executive at Disney who was tasked with reimagining the Disney stores asked the late, great Steve Jobs what he should do. Jobs response was, “Dream bigger.” As a result, the new Disney stores are considered a playground more than a retail store and an extension of their brand. Their vision is to be the best 30 minutes of a child’s day.<sup>i</sup>

Admittedly I have been a fan of Apple since purchasing a Mac Plus the year it was introduced (1986) and admired the late Steve Jobs and his passion for creativity and simplicity during his first round at Apple, his exile to NeXT and his triumphant return to Apple. When I read articles such as Shaw's I'm not surprised; rather it fits perfectly into my own experiences of satisfaction and no small joy of using Apple products.

Returning to the above article, it's instructive to note that what contributes to Apple's success is that it's “a place for like-minded people to meet” and to “get involved...to touch the merchandise...to create an excellent experience.” In fact in one quote I will return to soon, Disney, taking a page out of Jobs' playbook, have stated that “their vision is to be the best 30 minutes of a child's day.”

It is important to add that Apple's pursuit of providing that outstanding experience doesn't stop when you exit the store, but rather they have worked diligently to provide a way that you can continue the interaction and deepen your experience every single day through a well thought out and tightly controlled iPhone, iPad and iTunes eco-system. All Apple app developers must meet strict rules of design and content to win approval on Apple app store. In fact, so good are they at providing a user-friendly, profitable, but closed and highly controlled environment, one that they say must exist if their customers are to get full value and maintain the exceptional Apple experience that people covet, that critics and competitors alike claim that “Apple's ecosystem locks consumers in.”<sup>ii</sup> In other words, Apple is so good at retaining customers they have earned that it is difficult to convert them to competing products even if those products are much cheaper and copy many of Apple's innovations and designs.

While what Apple has accomplished has been lauded as revolutionary, the reality is that the company has simply discovered what the world's oldest and largest corporation, The Christian Church, has offered her members since her creation by Christ: A complete immersion of life in the Spirit that creates more than a “club” with excited members flocking in to join with other “like-minded people” to “get involved” by singing, tithing, and touching through the laying on of hands and in taking up the bread and wine (O taste and see that the Lord is good!).

However in America, especially among evangelical churches and despite the emphasis upon being “born again” and sermons focused on how congregants feel as opposed to what they know (indeed, not all bad), there has been a devaluing and weakening of the experiences that excite and retain her members. The good news is that many church leaders are placing an emphasis upon making church “the best 30 minutes” of a child and adult’s day! I know some of my more theologically minded friends may disagree with me, but there’s nothing wrong with church being fun and enjoyable, even for children. What do we want, to make it the most dreaded time of the day or week, proving our dedication and maturity in the Lord by how long we can sit without falling asleep! “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘come, let us go into the house of the Lord.’” Real worship has always been loud, participatory and full of joy. Raising hands, singing out loud, giving in the offering, hearing the “Good News” while processing its application for our life followed by physically partaking at the Lord’s Table is as immersed in experience as it gets!

That brings me to my point, but please note: This is not an article on how bad or deficient the church is. I love the church and think the criticism is vastly overdone. It preceded me (and you) by 2,000 years and changed the world and, excepting for the return of Christ, will grow stronger and larger for another 2,000 years after I’m gone. Besides, it’s Christ’s church and He claimed He would build her. He’s not called the Master Builder for nothing.

The reality is that at her worst the church is still the best and most important institution on earth, and she is still Christ’s bride (the family may be the most basic institution, but the church is the most important. Christ died for the church. However, God sees both as vital and they are not set one against the other, but rather have a harmonious relationship, strengthening each other).

At her best the church lifts the light of Christ high and proclaims liberty to the captives and rolls back the darkness of sin and extends the kingdom of God with conditions and lives of believers and unbelievers vastly improved throughout the earth. Agreeing with John Calvin, if God is our Father the church is our mother and all Christians are commanded to be part of the church or wither and die. I am only offering an observation, an opinion passionately argued, that the church simply needs to go “back to the future,” and not that far back at all to recall, reclaim and restore the very elements that so many recognize as the foundation for success in businesses such as Apple. Those elements are Confidence, Communion and Calendar (I think my life-long friend and now pastor, Kelvin Page, is having an effect on me thinking in terms of alliteration. However, his sermons are always more memorable than mine, so here goes...)

Churches, by-and-large have done a good job of improving the worship experience and the rise of the mega-church offering those attending everything from gourmet coffee to drama and music to go along with better designed and more attractive churches. For those objecting to these trends it would do them good to revisit the detailed accounts of feasting, pageantry, emphasis upon “beauty and glory” along with the importance of musical instruments and singers in the Old Testament temple worship. A revitalized church experience has brought many people back to the church for worship. However, it’s my opinion that the church has at least three powerful Spirit-infused means at her disposal that we have downplayed or forgotten about.

### **Confidence: The Church is the Preeminent Institution on Earth**

First the church must reclaim a mind-set and cultural aura that Apple takes very seriously with profound effect. It is the unshakable confidence that they are changing the world with their products. Apple is famous for their product announcement events, with tickets allowing entry coveted by all

reporters and tech titans with even competitors hanging on every word, trying to emulate all aspects. In these events Apple spokesmen are never shy about telling everyone how they are changing the world for the better. Likewise, because the products are so important, their stores are precisely planned and their employees highly skilled and trained to represent them and maximize customer experience and build powerful loyalty.

I'm developing this more fully in another article, but let me point out that while there is no doubt that pastors and church leaders understand the importance of their mission and need to *reach the world* for Christ, too often the American evangelical church has forgotten that it is empowered by the Spirit to visualize and promise *changing the world* for Christ. We are great at talking about individual redemption and life-change, and there's no doubt that these are important topics, but we've shied away from proclaiming the goal of world-wide "redemption and lift," to use a great phrase coined by missiologists Win Arn and Donald McGavran.

Chadwick Owens, in a chapter in *The Oxford History of The Christian Church*, points out that somewhere in the late 1800's the church lost its confidence that it had a superior message of hope, redemption and life. Once that confidence was lost, its power to change the world dissipated. The church must regain the confidence that she and she alone can truly change the world and make it a better place economically, scientifically, legally, socially/relationally and culturally. The church preaches salvation, but is also the fountainhead of *all* wisdom, knowledge and understanding, not just individual spiritual wisdom, knowledge and understanding!

Further, the church is to teach and disciple *nations*, not just individuals, confidently reasserting theology as "the queen of sciences." Returning to Steve Jobs advice to Disney in Shaw's article, the church must "dream bigger" and anticipate world-wide change. This will attract and hold commitment and turn "cultural Christians" into truly passionate believers.

### **Communion: Partaking at the Lord's Table Is A Strong and Deeply Satisfying Personal Experience**

Apple understands the power of touch and personally experiencing their product. For the church, the second Spirit-infused means is one that enhances the worship (or in-store) experience by inviting members to touch and be touched by Christ in the most personal and powerful way possible: Partaking at the Lord's Table every week.

Too many evangelical churches regulate Communion to at best a monthly activity and in some cases, offer it to members once or twice a year. Rarely do we find evangelical church leaders who emphasize that Communion is more than a symbol, and even then there is a less than adequate understanding of the power of symbols (our enemies surely know, which is why many homosexual groups have appropriated the rainbow even as Christians forget its real meaning, promise and importance).

However Communion is unmistakably more than a symbol. Partaking of the bread and wine at the Lord's Table produces a tangible reality. Life may be poorer if we neglect symbols, *but there is no life in you if you do not partake of the body and blood of the Lord.*

In John 6:53-58 we find Jesus Himself making a straight-forward declaration concerning this:

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood

has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

Further, Paul tells us that tangible manifestations take place in the physical life of believers that reflects their spiritual condition. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 he writes:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

Perhaps it is precisely because we *fear* that eating the bread and drinking the wine is far more than simply a symbol is why we set it aside, believing we're shielding our members from the tragic consequences of eating and drinking “in an unworthy manner.” I know I grew up scared to death (no pun intended) that the Lord was going to punish me for some unknown and unconfessed sin that made me unworthy to partake at the Lord's Table. At the time, I was thankful our church only offered Communion twice a year! Although they surely meant well, the fact is that our pastors stressed the curses of being unworthy, and created additional stress by leaving that term or condition undefined and very broad, while seldom or never teaching us about the incredible benefits, blessings and abundant life available at the Table.

In a different context Paul warns about those who live a “don't touch, don't taste and don't handle” life and how foolish it is. Apple, and increasingly other businesses, understand the power of touch and handling their products. Of course there is no comparison between a product made by a company and the Jesus Christ and the church's use of bread and wine, but it remains a fact the God Himself imparted value and life-giving meaning into touching/tasting/eating the body and blood of Christ embodied in the bread and wine. The more we encourage our members to do so the more they experience the power and life of Christ, being refilled with the Spirit on a regular basis, creating a powerful and lasting effect on their life and loyalty to the Lord and His church.

By re-instituting a weekly invitation to the Lord's Table and strong, clear teaching concerning the value of Communion the church can and will reestablish one of its most powerful God ordained means to assuring full member satisfaction in every worship service with the result being that they enthusiastically return every week.

**Christian Calendar: Creating the Ecosystem and Culture to Thrive**

Just as Apple encourages its customers to constantly remain engaged with them through their “controlled ecosystem” comprised of iTunes and the Apple app store, so too does the church need to provide the ecosystem of intellectual, emotional and spiritual engagement and satisfaction outside of the worship service.

Of course very early on God gave His people a structured rhythm to live lives of meaning and joy as He established a religious-based calendar complete with wonderful feasts that defined and supported the covenant people. God's gift of this calendar highlighted not only days of celebration, but served to focus the thoughts of the nation upon Who God is and why they serve Him. Even later additions such as Purim (perhaps similar to our Independence Day celebration) served to remind them of God's care for His people and His awesome power to deliver them from evil and advance their faith.

For centuries the Christian church understood the value of time and how to use it to glorify God and give hope, joy and vision to her members. The Ascension of Christ brought about a clarity of revelation and a wholesale transformation of the Old Covenant calendar into a much better New Covenant version. Feasts and special events now highlighted the unveiling of all of God's promises fulfilled in Christ, Who was and is the fulfillment of the types and shadows hidden within the old symbols and celebrations. If you thought the old calendar was glorious and worthy of national feasts, how much more glorious is the new calendar and how much more compelling are the feasts for the King!<sup>iii</sup>

For instance, Ascension Day, which I have written about extensively, was a major feast day for the Christian Church, commemorating the fulfillment of Daniel's vision in which Christ is seated with the Father in heaven and arrayed in glory with all power and authority.<sup>iv</sup> “It was a day of rejoicing and celebrating as reported as far back as Augustine, who wrote, 'the Feast of the Ascension has been kept from time immemorial and probably was instituted by the apostles.’”<sup>v</sup> Ascension Day feasts reminded Christians that Jesus had ascended to the throne and reigned in power. It kept that truth front and center in the believer's and non-believer's mind and served as a tremendous encouragement to those who faced persecution. Unfortunately for the church today, many Christians have never considered that it is a day worthy of an extravagant party!<sup>vi</sup>

While the American evangelical church has ignored the universal need for a thoughtful “ecosystem” of meaningful time use, others have not. With a void created as the church largely abandoned a time and event framework for life, Hallmark stepped in and now gladly (and very profitably) shapes our culture by creating new events to celebrate and enlisting the help of numerous other companies (“He went to Jared's!”) on how to do so.<sup>vii</sup>

The church can advance her message and improve people's lives if she reasserts one of the more powerful means to keep members educated, engaged and excited. The Christian calendar is arguably the most effective way to create and shape not only her member's life, but the entire national culture. Yes, reincorporating the Christian Calendar into the everyday life of the church and her members can do that and more.

You may wonder about the real ability an emphasis upon time can be in influencing culture. Alexander Schmemmann anticipated this very question as he wrote about time and the church. He observes that to speak of the Christian year,

is even more difficult than to speak of Sunday, because for the modern Christian the relation between this "Christian year" and time has become incomprehensible and, therefore, irrelevant .

. . . On certain dates the Church commemorates certain events of the past — nativity, resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit. These dates are an occasion for a liturgical "illustration" of certain theological affirmations, but as such they are in no way related to the real time or of consequence to it. Even within the Church itself they are mere "breaks" in the normal routine of its activities, and many business minded and action-oriented Christians secretly consider these festivals and celebrations a waste of time.<sup>viii</sup>

Further, Dennis Bratcher, writing for the Christian Resource Institute, notes:

“The Christian church, following earlier Jewish tradition, has long used the seasons of the year as an opportunity for festivals and holidays, sacred time set aside to worship God as the Lord of life...the Christian Church year focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus. The sequence of festivals from Advent to Resurrection Sunday becomes an annual spiritual journey for worshipers as they kneel at the manger, listen on a hillside, walk the streets of Jerusalem, hear the roar of the mob, stand beneath the cross, and witness the resurrection! The rest of the church year provides opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the coming of Jesus and his commission to his people to be a light to the world.”<sup>ix</sup>

### **Confidence, Communion and Calendar as the Church's Closed Combination**

I'll return one last time to the successful Apple “closed” and “tightly controlled” model as it compares to the Android “open” approach and what is basically a developer and user free-for-all environment that some prefer.

In contrast to Apple's approach in which end-user experience, satisfaction and retention is of utmost importance, therefore requiring a diligence that borders on paranoia, the Android world is highly fragmented and unorganized, seemingly slapped together, neither promising nor offering any unifying experience.<sup>x</sup> It is a user-beware model with non-compatible versions of software and hardware all lumped under the “Android” label. It has a huge market share but provides low levels of customer satisfaction to go with the equally low level of profits. Essentially it serves as a feeder system to Apple. Indeed, it is why Google and their partners, such as Samsung and Amazon attempt to reproduce the Apple approach even as they criticize it. (Especially Amazon and its goals for complete customer integration and marketing tie-ins being the rationale for the Kindle products that they heavily subsidize. See the new Kindle HDX for example.)

The church has historically been supremely confident in its message and mission. She has historically provided the avenue for believers to develop and nurture strong and authentic relationships, both with other members (brothers and sisters in Christ) and with God Himself. You may say the church has proclaimed the most important subject, man's need for re-establishing relationship with the transcendent God of creation, with the accessible, immanent solution, Emmanuel, God with us, touchable not only spiritually, but tangibly in the bread and wine. The church has been given the absolute assurance of success from her Founder and Lord. She has been given Spiritual means to reach out and change the world, even to transform the understanding and marking of time itself, beginning with the way the world will measure it, Before Christ (B.C.) and “In the year of our Lord,” or Anno Domini (A.D.). Even the new designations cannot escape that reality as B.C.E. And C.E. Stand “Before Common Era” and “Common Era,” both Biblical descriptions as declared through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross in Ephesians 2:11-18.

Compared to the church's offering of life and life more abundant opportunities combined with the

powerful experience of redemption, forgiveness and righteousness with a life of full immersion (baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to know that “in [Christ] we live and more and have our being”) all the best run organizations in the world are simply reminders of what the church is and what she offers. That's not a bad thing to aspire to.

- i Article found at: <http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20131209124912-284615-apple-imitation-is-the-highest-form-of-flattery?trk=mp-details-rc>.
- ii While it would be too time consuming to note every person making this charge, two interesting ones stand out. In an online article at [www.bgr.com](http://www.bgr.com) Alan Kay, the computer pioneer who created graphical user interfaces at Xerox PARC and inspired Steve Jobs in design and creation of many products, states he's deeply disappointed that "iPad and iPhone users are locked into Apple's ecosystem." He apparently prefers the open Android system, although it's implied, not stated. See "Pioneering computer UI architect rips Apple's closed ecosystem" at <http://bgr.com/2013/04/03/alan-kay-apple-criticism-412925/>. The Motley Fool, an investment advice site, laments that "The quality of Apple's products attracts consumers, but, once they buy in, they're more or less stuck...Surveys indicate that more than 90% of current iPhone owners intend to stick with the device through their next upgrade cycle. This may be due, in part, to the money that the company has poured into the Apple ecosystem." Frankly I enjoy reading The Motley Fool, but this depiction of people who willingly make decisions based on "the quality of Apple's products" reinforced by the company's huge investment "into the Apple ecosystem" that provides unprecedented user satisfaction as victims who are "more or less stuck," is mind boggling. You can read the entire rationale here: [http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2013/10/13/apples-ecosystem-threatened-by-googles-upcoming-io.aspx#\\_Ur5NSCnDths](http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2013/10/13/apples-ecosystem-threatened-by-googles-upcoming-io.aspx#_Ur5NSCnDths).
- iii See 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 and of course all of Hebrews!
- iv Daniel 7:13-14 & 27
- v Craig R. Dumont, The Ascension of Christ: Deity, Sovereignty, Salvation with Intercession. Available on line at [http://craigdumont.publishpath.com/Websites/CraigDumont/images/Ascension\\_of\\_Christ\\_PDF.pdf](http://craigdumont.publishpath.com/Websites/CraigDumont/images/Ascension_of_Christ_PDF.pdf)
- vi The theology of feasting has been largely ignored by American evangelicals. For my take on this please see my article "Celebration and Rejoicing: A 'Consumption Tax' That Christians Can Live With!" Chalcedon Report, November 2002. I developed this theme further in The Theology of Feasting: Developing a community of celebration around an overflowing table, an article developed from a sermon I preached in 2009. It is available upon request if you email me at [Craig@DominionLeadershipNetwork.org](mailto:Craig@DominionLeadershipNetwork.org).
- vii I'm not in any way attacking Hallmark, nor am I against Mother's Day (I have no death wish!). Many can be and are being used by churches to advance Biblical truth. There is no doubt we especially need to reemphasize the important role that God gave fathers and Valentines Day is something the writer of the Song of Solomon would surely enjoy. However, the point is that if the church does not lead in creating an time/event ecosystem providing joyful and meaningful structure to people's lives, a service the church has provided to her members and the entire world for 2,000 years, others surely will.
- viii Alexander Schmemmann, For the Life of the World
- ix Dennis Bratcher, The Seasons of the Church Year, <http://www.crivoice.org/chyear.html>. I highly recommend this site-Christian Resource Institute Voice-to evangelical Christians of all stripes as it is an incredible resource covering the symbolism and feasts of the year and providing many ideas for worship based upon the season. Their Advent resources are outstanding.
- x I want to be clear in pointing out that while I prefer the Apple model in terms of my own product purchases and in illustrating church potential, I'm very much in favor of Google's entry with Android, especially offering it free. On this topic I could and will write a article about how many companies today are profiting by lining up with God's law for prosperity: Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down and overflowing. More on that to come. Competition and freedom are God-given gifts and should be promoted in every area, including, if not especially, within the business world. Competition is good and provides the setting for the highest and best use of resources and improved lifestyles for all mankind. Interestingly, the church's greatest achievements with civilization-advancing benefits were met in the crucible of competitive theological debate as she articulated and defended Biblical orthodoxy throughout the ages. So go for it, Google! Go for it, Samsung! Go for it Microsoft! Competition makes the world a better, richer and happier place.