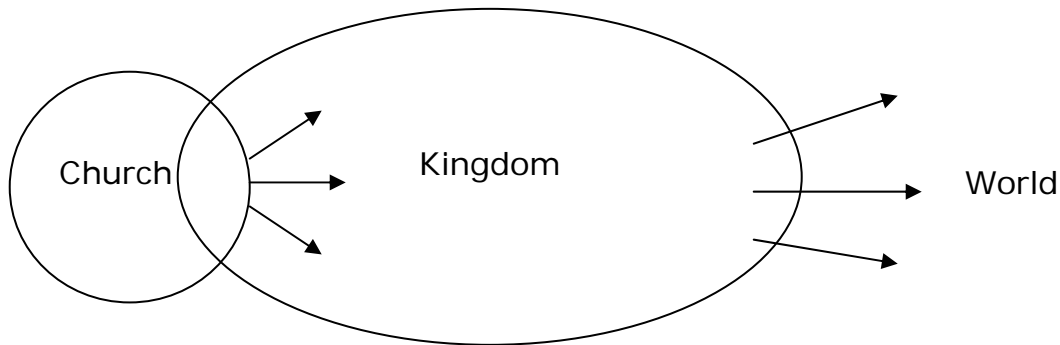


Question #2

This course is entitled "Kingdom, Church and World." Using simple geometric shapes draw a simple diagram of how you see these three concepts being related, then discuss why you chose each symbol and why you positioned them as you did.



I was dramatically taken in by McLaren's geometrical representation (shown above, from McLaren 84) of the interaction between Kingdom, Church, and World and I have chosen to follow it as an excellent summation of the three interacting central topics of our course. As shown, the church is an entity that should have an effect on the kingdom of God, which in turn should have an effect on the world. Many people picture the church as synonymous with the kingdom, however this is inaccurate because the kingdom of God includes so much more. The kingdom represents all the ways in which God works in our world as a whole and we know that God is not limited to solely working vicariously through the church. By the same token, the church is not wholly contained within the kingdom because "there's too much stuff that goes on in the church that has nothing to

do with God's kingdom" (McLaren 83). But what does the kingdom represent? How does God work in our world? As detailed by Howard Snyder in Kingdom, Church, and World, the coming of God's kingdom in our world is seen through peace, concern for the environment, social justice especially for the poor, Sabbath rest, and jubilee liberation from debt and bondage (adapted from Snyder part one).

The symbol for the church is a circle because it encapsulates and holds the body of Christ united as a community and family. The circle also represents the cyclical eternal relationship between Christ and his bride the church – they are his because he is theirs and he is theirs because they are his. The symbol for the kingdom is elliptical because it is like a stretched circle encapsulating the wonderful work of God in our world and bridging the gap between the church and the world. It is through the work and power of God that the church is able to minister to the world. The symbol for the world is that it is not bound by a symbol since it is the rest of that which is. The arrows from the kingdom to the world represent the fact that whenever God works in the world, God affects the world. The arrows from the church to the kingdom are ideally understood to be the church's "catalytic [effect] for the kingdom of God, for the good of the world" (McLaren 84).

A common misconception is that the church exists within the kingdom of God as a result of being the people of God and the

kingdom of God exists within the world (thus a set of two concentric circles for instance). The misconception lies within the passive thought that as the people of God the church lives to reap the blessings of God from his kingdom which exists in this world. As Christians, we are to find our holy family within the church and work together within and through the power of the kingdom of God in order to have a positive effect on the world. As seen in the full diagram, we Christians are set in a position to spark magnificent change in the world as a whole if we work together to be that catalyst for the power of the kingdom of God which in turn will translate into the world becoming a better, more peaceful, more beautiful, more just, more restful, and more free place.

Question #4

In John Wesley's sermon "The General Spread of the Gospel" what is set forth as the means by which the gospel will spread to the whole earth? How does this compare or contrast with McLaren's perception of our missional task as the people of God?

When John Wesley preached the sermon entitled "The General Spread of the Gospel" in approximately 1783 (date as given by <http://wesley.nnu.edu/JohnWesley/sermons/chron.htm>), our world was a remarkably different place. To travel anywhere, you either walked or rode some combination of a horse and carriage unless it was an extremely long distance and then you rode a boat. This being the case, the normal way to get from point A to point D was through points B and C whereas today we could simply take a plane straight to point D. It is most likely that these rudimentary forms of travel of his day influenced Wesley's thoughts on the spread of the gospel. Wesley perceived the gospel moving like a plague (for lack of a better term) - those nations that were already deemed "Christian" would have more interaction with their neighboring countries and thereby the neighboring countries would receive the gospel and continue to pass it on to their neighbors. However, as we have seen in the Middle East the "Mahometans" (as Wesley refers to them) have a strong belief in their faith and the Christian gospel spreading to them is not as simple as increased communication with neighboring nations who are predominantly Christian.

Near the end of McLaren's details of the conversations of Dan and Neo, we listen as they discuss Christian interaction with unbelievers and how Jesus interacted with sinners in his day. The discussion turns to evangelism - specifically, interpersonal evangelism - and exactly how Christians are to spread the gospel. Neo explain his frustration with the term and the act of "friendship evangelism" because the friendship is then only for the sake of evangelism and is exploitative when we pretend to be friends for the sole purpose of proselytization. As they continue to discuss the activity of Christians in the world, they agree that the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Kingdom of Heaven' refer to something that is here and now on earth and that we are a part of. But how do we take part in the spreading of the Kingdom? Concisely put, we love our neighbor. This statement of Jesus encapsulates more than we can imagine, but Neo stresses that in evangelism we should focus more on the conversation rather than counting the number of conversions. Focusing on conversions rather than building relationships results in a consumeristic approach to salvation that turns salvation into a finish line for our spiritual journey instead of the starting line that it is. This consumeristic approach has also individualized salvation to the point that we have lost our sense of community and its importance. As a result of this consumeristic and individualistic outlook, modern Christians focus more on avoiding hell

via salvation rather than bringing the kingdom of God to earth. The simplest way we as Christians do that is by spreading the love of Christ to those around us (our neighbors).

While it seems that Wesley did not know what he was talking about since the “plague” of Christianity (again, pardon the term) has not finished “infecting” the earth, maybe he was simply an extreme optimist. If we do indeed focus our communities of Christians on bringing the kingdom of God to earth by loving our neighbors, the only logical result we would expect is for the perfect love of Christ to transform our neighbors’ lives and continue spreading. However, somewhere along the way this spreading was stunted and slowed down. We may not know the reasons for this, but we can know one thing for sure – we can be the answer. We can shine the light of Christ into our world wherever we go as we show others his love. Let us, the church, hold ourselves accountable to bring love, peace, justice, and jubilee to the world around us!