

# Church and Culture

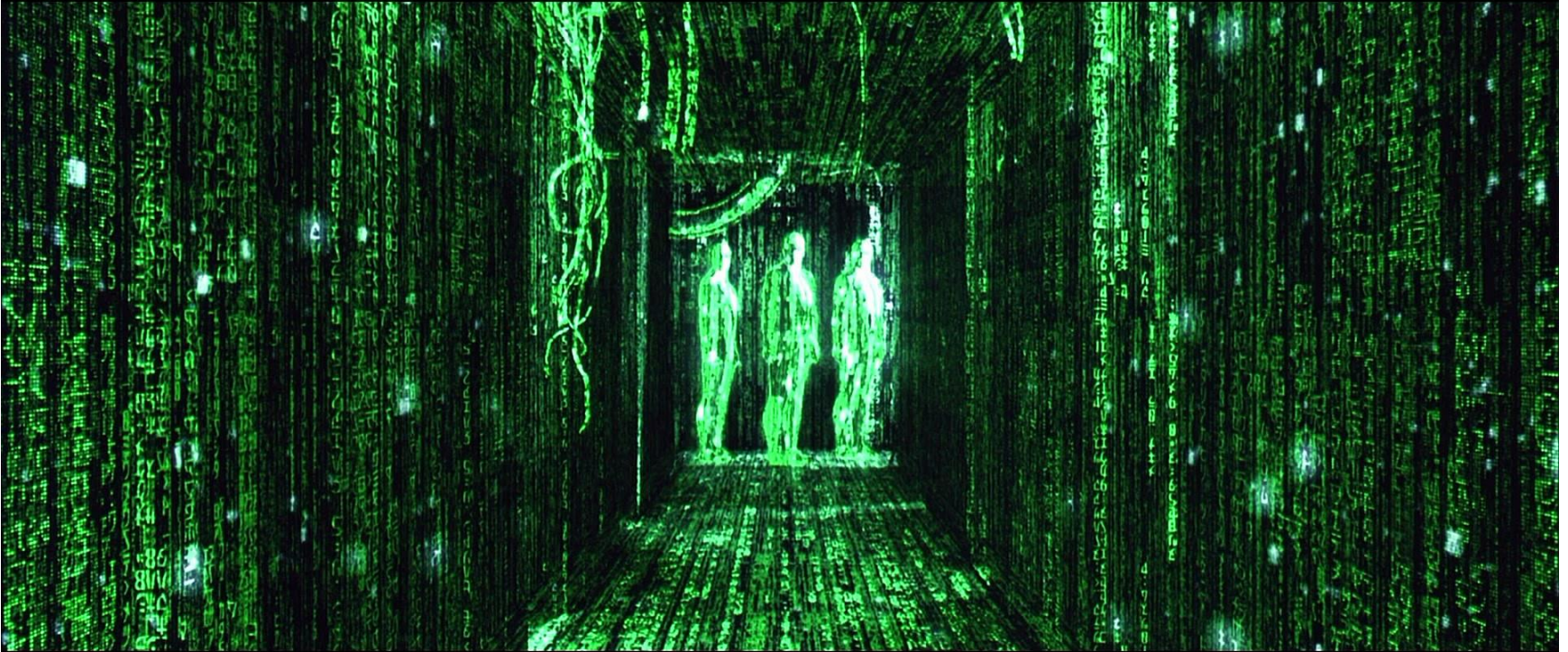
Dr Maithrie White



# What's it all about?

- **Church** –
  - The Corporate body of Christians, all churches;
  - Christians as individuals;
- **Culture** –
  - Collective social behaviour, ideas, customs of a people or society (OED).

It's like the Matrix



*So, will you take the blue pill...*

Comfort,  
disengagement  
& ignorance.

*...or the red pill?*

Sacrifice,  
engagement  
& the truth.

*The Matrix. 3*

# It's like Water

The fish is the last to discover water

*- Proverb*

# Called to Transform Culture

- “Redeemed from” and “redeemed for”
- Transformed, not Conformed

# What is Culture?

- Not one culture, but three:
  - Residual culture
  - Dominant culture
  - Traces of an Emergent culture of the future
- Contemporary Culture:
  - Modernism (scientific, rational, truth)
  - Postmodernism (today's dominant culture)
  - Emergent culture to come?



# Postmodern themes

- Re-enchantment, return to mystery
- Constructed realities: images
- Hyperreality: real and imaginary are indistinguishable
- Life's a yolk... crack it, fry it!
- Absence of identity: the fragmented self
- Globalization / Glocalization
- Virtuality and media culture
- Spectacle: the sensational dominates
- Manufactured needs: told what to want
- Commodification: all is a commodity to buy/consume
- Time & space compressed: smaller, faster world



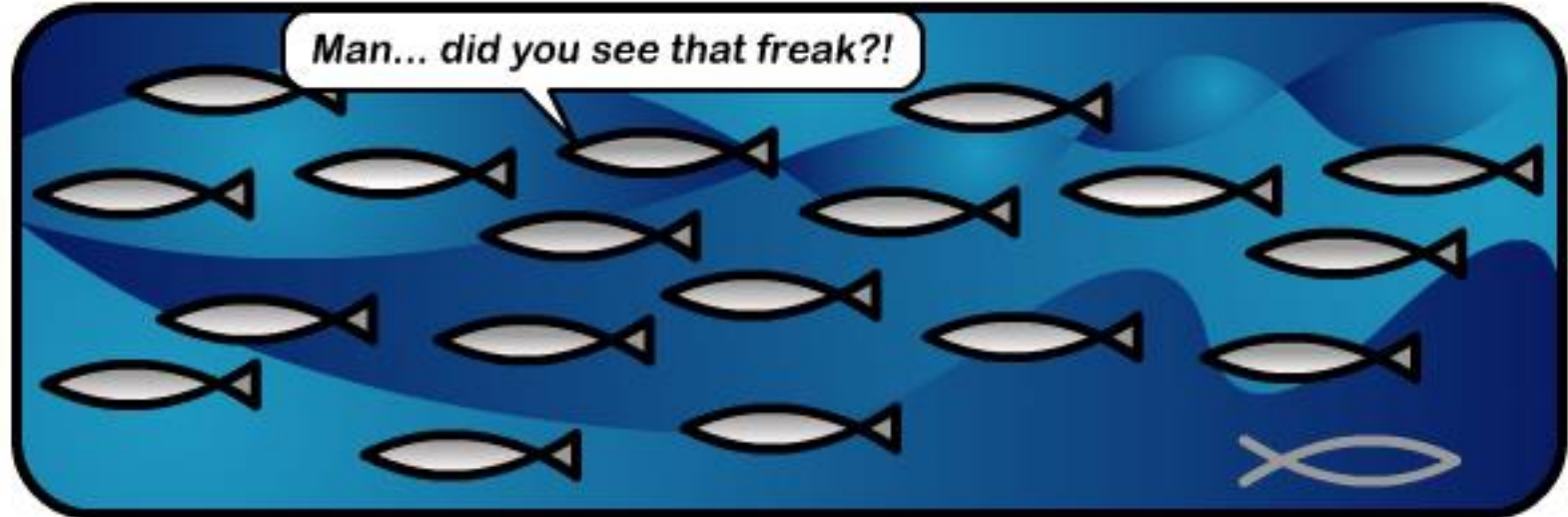
# Contemporary culture

- Consumerism and “amoral” veneration of profit
- Global community & the idolatry of our time
- Here and now – God’s Kingdom’s values and the legacy of the Troubles

# Culture

- Individual

Individual influences: ethnic, racial, family, class, politics, specialism, work, career



*Swimming against the tide.*

# Culture

- Individual
- Contemporary

# Contemporary influences: media, leisure, consumption, immediacy, accumulation



*Worshipping at the feet of a harsh god.*



# Culture

- Individual
- Contemporary
- Work or University
- Church

# Church Influences

- Structures
  - the unstructured structure
  - the no-tradition tradition
- Favourite Doctrine
- Flavour of Spirituality
- Norms / rules / expectations for conduct
- Language and jargon
- Music
- Way of Praying
- Communion



# Church culture



**DUALISM...**  
**THE ENEMY OF**  
**THE FAITH!**

Dualism. 1

# Church culture & norms



*The kind of conversion we're comfortable with.*

# Models of Engagement

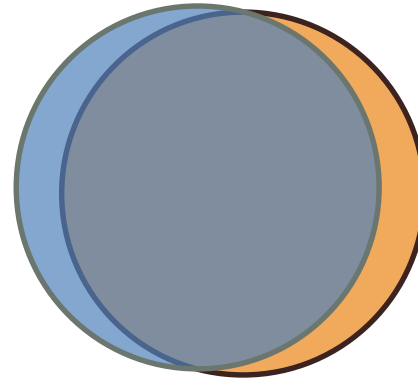
# 3 Models

- Conflict and Alienation



# 3 Models

- Conflict and Alienation
- Assimilation

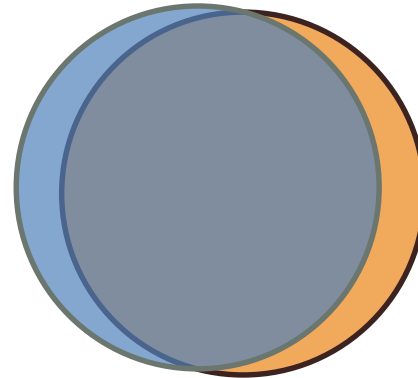


# 3 Models

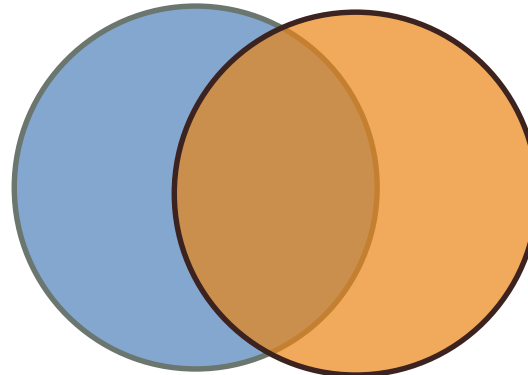
- Conflict and Alienation



- Assimilation



- Engagement and Transformation



# Engagement: Biblical models

- Old Testament: assimilation or antagonism
- Jesus
- New Testament Church



# How to engage

1. Understand our wider culture
2. Understand our church culture
3. Examine our cultural baggage
4. Preach relevantly
5. Decide how to respond to the culture around us

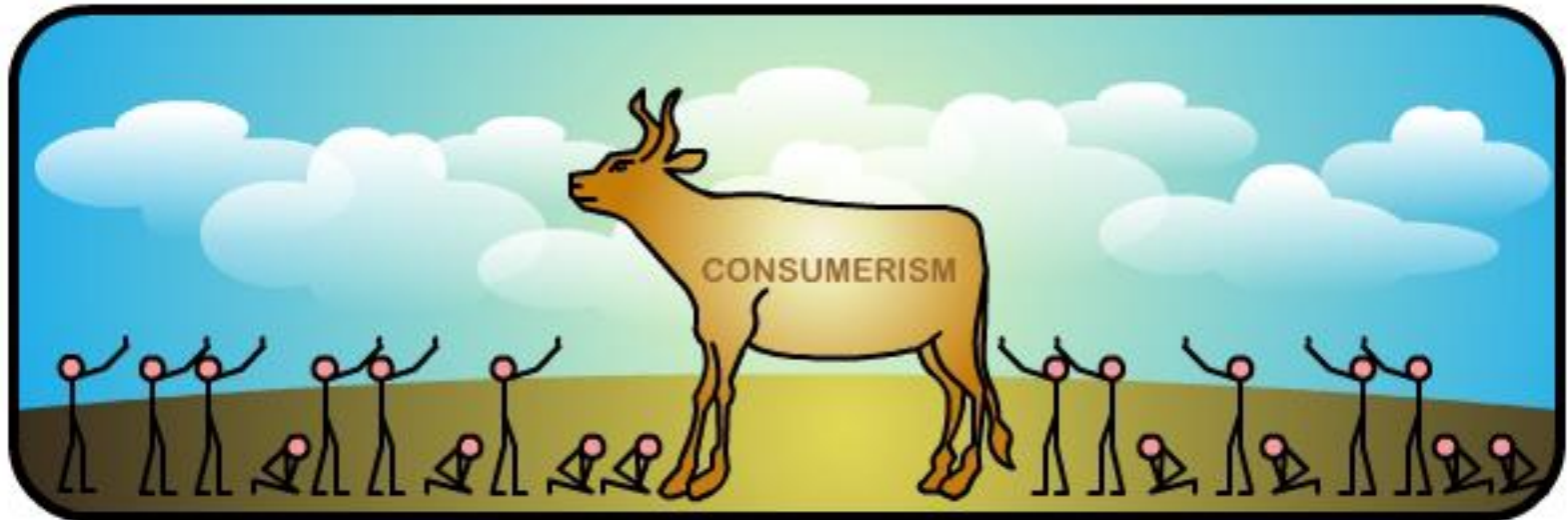
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# How to engage

1. Understand our wider culture

# How to engage: wider culture

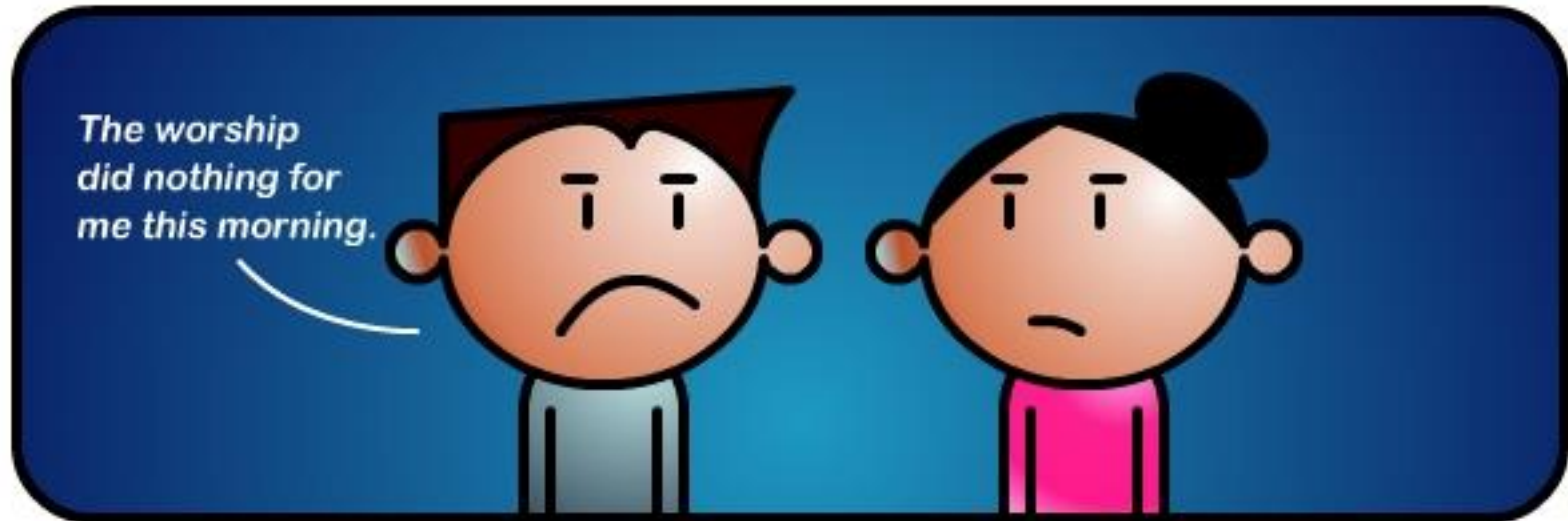


*The new 'golden calf'.*

# How to Engage

1. Understand our wider culture
2. Understand our church culture

# How to engage: consuming Church?



*An unhappy consumer.*

# How to engage: consuming Church?



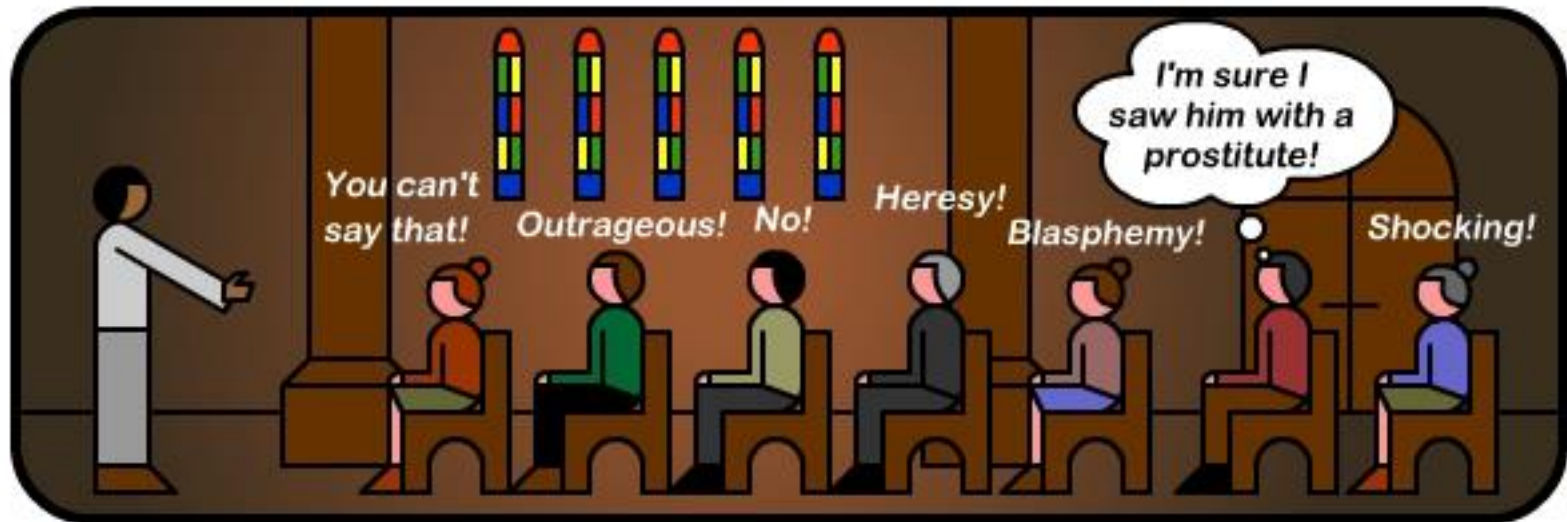
*One sugar, or two?*



# How to engage

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2. Understand our church culture
3. Examine our cultural baggage

# How to engage: cultural baggage?

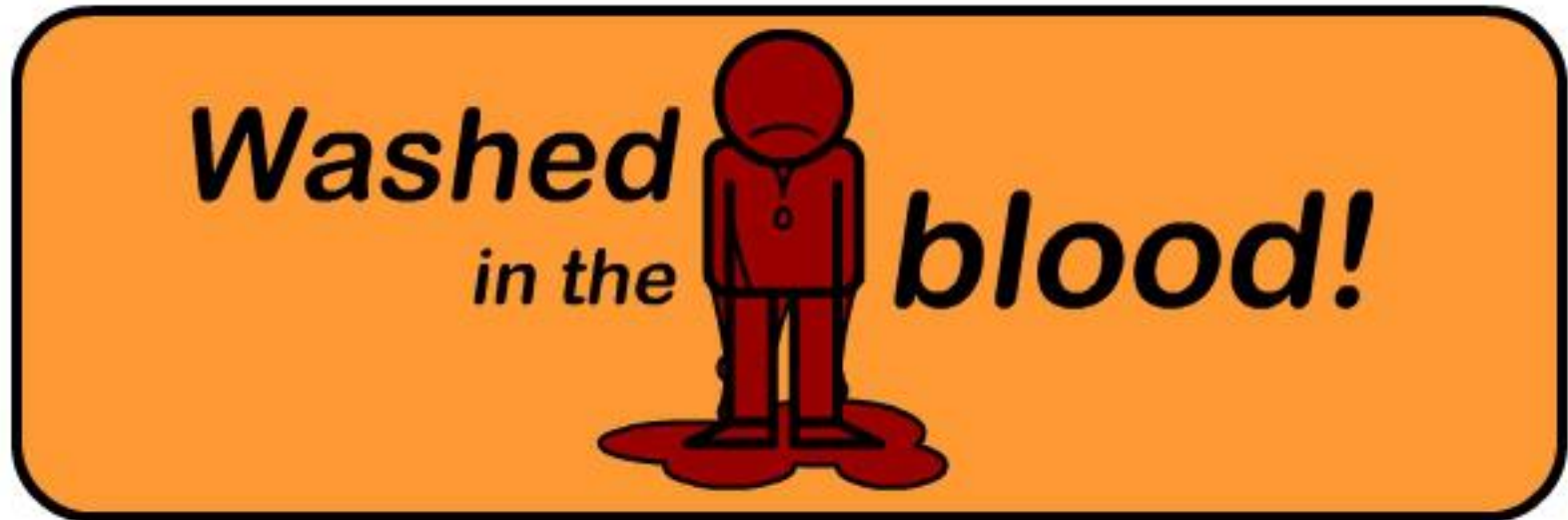


*The morning Jesus came to preach.*

# How to engage

1. Understand our wider culture
2. Understand our church culture
3. Examine our cultural baggage
4. Preach relevantly

# Relevant and understandable?



*Some things just sound weird without a context.*

# How to engage

1. Understand our wider culture
2. Understand our church culture
3. Examine our cultural baggage
4. Preach relevantly
5. Decide how to respond to the culture around us

# How to engage: response to culture?



*Sometimes anger is the thoughtful approach.*

# Five Voices

- The voice of responsibility for the world
- The voice of blessing on the world
- The voice of suffering with the world
- The voice of prophecy to the world
- The voice of hope in the world.



# Further Reading

## Theology and Culture

- “*How Can The Bible Be Authoritative?*”  
[http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Bible\\_Authoritative.htm](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm)
- “*Paul: Fresh Perspectives*” – N. T. Wright
- “*Rescuing the Church from Consumer Culture*” – Mark Clavier
- “*Who’s afraid of Postmodernism*” – James. K. Smith

## Magazines

- Third Way
- Magnet

Contemporary Christianity Mailing list!

## Moving away from “consumerism” and examining the ethics of products

- Ethical Consumer website <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/home.aspx>
- Freecycle, Freegle, Gumtree
- (Academic) “*Simulation and Simulacra*” – Jean Baudrillard
- “*The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*” – Fredric Jameson
- “*God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*” – John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon

Cartoons by Jon Birch, ASBO Jesus @ <http://asbojesus.wordpress.com/>

Questions?