

## **Mudcastle: New millennium Christianity March 2001**

**By Cathy Townley**

The story of Mudcastle is exciting for me, because I've been hearing that the "Mudcastles" of the world represent postmodern Christianity. I feel as though I'm seeing God's history played out before my eyes.

Last June, during a denominational gathering in St. Cloud, MN, a few of us had dinner at a local restaurant. On our way out, we ran into a former youth group kid of one in our group. This young man, who struggled with life and was never fully committed to youth group, now lives in a ministry house where he helps run an underground Christian group called Mudcastle. He took us there to see for ourselves.

Mudcastle is underground because it's so far outside the institutional church it's beyond definition. The founder, Gracemarie, is fond of saying, "I don't do religion. No time. These kids are dying out here..." She means she's not waiting for approval from the organized church that will dictate style, content and process while kids are doing drugs and dangerous rituals as a result of not knowing Jesus. The Mudcastle group waits for no one to bring a radical message of Christianity to the streets of St. Cloud.

And wow, is that different from how we approach ministry in our tepid congregations that are so concerned with preserving the institution that Jesus somehow gets watered down. In our politically correct churches, if you love Jesus too much, you're labeled fundamentalist or conservative. But Mudcastle is not beholden to hierarchical control, and that gives them a lot of freedom to be clear. Though I may not agree with everything they say, I am more open to their ministry than I am to "Christian" groups that make it impossible for me to be in love with Jesus for fear of being ostracized.

Yet when I first met the Mudcastle group, I admit, I thought they were a cult. Gracemarie wasn't there; we saw her on the group's website video. I have since met her, and she's very powerful, all 4'11" of her. She's SO clear about who she is and what she stands for that it's almost overpowering. Yet, for what it's worth, after spending time with her, my own discernment tells me that her power, though extreme and cutting, is Godly, and I trust it.

This group is not a cult, any more than the first century Christian movement was a cult. Mudcastle represents the 21st century house church. Futurists have predicted that we'd see the house church emerge in post modernity, since post modernity is pagan and polytheistic, much like the first few centuries A.D., where the house church flourished. The Christian message then (as it must be now), was exceedingly clear to counter the numerous alternative religions that sought to take a believer to a higher plane without Jesus; yet, the way Christianity was expressed was (and will be) more akin to alternative spiritualities than to organized religion. In other words, authentic Christianity in the new millennium will often feel cultish.

It's 24-7 Christianity. It's holistic living; just like in the Acts of the Apostles, the Mudcastle group wakes and sleeps Christianity. It's disciplined communion and community. And yet, though they're somewhat set apart from the world, they're also in constant conversation with the culture around them. That's how they reach people.

The Mudcastle Christians have no question but that they've been saved because Jesus has championed over the forces of death and evil throughout eternity. Jesus is Christus Victor, the same Jesus that converted the pagans of the book of Acts. It takes much more than an interesting prophet to reach those who have Wicca, Goth, crystals and Oprah. It takes dramatic testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit whose role is to convict non-believers with the truth that there is but one God, who is Jesus, the real life flesh and blood of the Father. No other spirituality or world religion can claim that; it's the truth of the Christian gospel alone.

And when we who have grown up in modernity hear that, we resist, because modernity has valued "inclusiveness," which seems to mean, "middle-of-the-road." Christianity that plays the middle in post modernity will not survive. That frightens modernity. So we'll point at Gracemarie and note that at age 45, not only does she not have a seminary degree, she's a high school drop out. We'll worry about what she's teaching our kids with no one to supervise her, like a denominational official.

But the first Apostles didn't go to seminary. In fact, according to the teachings of church growth experts Bill Easum and Tom Bandy, Gracemarie is doing everything right. Bill and Tom say that in the new millennium, Christian leaders won't be seminary trained; they'll build team based communities; they'll infuse DNA into other leaders as fast as they can (that's the accountability structure); they'll use the arts and technology to communicate the gospel; they'll be risk taking entrepreneurs; they'll be outside denominational mandates; they'll be passionately sold out to Jesus; and they'll often be women. That's Gracemarie, to a "w".

But here's the difference: she's not doing it because she read it in a book or went to a seminar; she's doing it because she's doing it. "There's no program, people!" she said. She's right. Christianity in the new millennium isn't a program; it's a way of life. You do what it takes to bring Jesus into the world.

Gracemarie sees it as a battle. The sign in front of her house reads "Mudcastle soldiers;" she's amused by the metaphor. Many of us modern Christians would decry her theology; yet in Gracemarie's postmodern world, there's a massive spiritual battle going on that requires warfare to win. That's Biblical. The word Mudcastle is also Biblical, and came out of Gracemarie's reverie of her life being in the muck when she realized we all come from the earth, yet we're royalty in Jesus.

Still, I admit, Mudcastle is tough to take. Those of us who struggle with either the truth of Jesus and / or the changes in the culture will try to find language to explain this group, and it will be an intellectual attempt to grapple with God unleashed, who is demanding and even dangerous, especially if you don't believe, but even if you do.

And that's the face of Christianity today. Not all authentic Christian communities will be exactly like Mudcastle; there will be different approaches to expressing the Gospel and different social and even theological views. But there is no question that where Christianity thrives in post modernity there will be unbridled passion for Jesus and clarity about his Godly identity; and a lifestyle that exhibits miraculous salvation.

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Her organization, WellSprings, seeks to train and resources churches to develop worship that is indigenous, expressive, creative, and focused on Jesus. Her mission is Sharing Jesus with the World through Worship and the Arts.

This article is taken from next• wave. <http://www.next-wave.org/mar01/mudcastle.htm>

For more information about Mudcastle, we invite you to visit <http://www.mudcastle.us>

Dear Readers,

Some things have changed since the writing of this article. For one, I don't live in the same house I originally started the ministry in. Mudcastle now owns a more traditional church building, although we are renovating the interior which will again make our choice of environment for worship, less traditional.

I would also like to make mention of the fact that I did get my GED and was able to attend college. Continuing education was very beneficial to me, in spite of the fact that I could not finish and get my degree. Something better came my way. I quit school to devote my life to persons who were at risk of losing theirs. The education I did get could never have been gotten in an institution of higher learning. What I learned was from the Most High.

Today I have another non-profit, "Gracemarie's Song." This organization is my platform for telling my story of having been a victim of human trafficking and sexual exploitation (sexploitation). I am a survivor, but what's more, an overcomer. <http://www.gracemariesong.com>

John 16.33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Rom. 8.37 ¶ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Gratefully,  
Gracemarie