

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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*The Formation of Faithful Communities of Jesus Apprentices
Through Biblical Governance*

or

*Creating Leaderful Cultures of Jesus Apprentices for Missional
Engagement in the Postmodern World*

Alan Roxburgh in his latest book on leadership and cultural shift describes our situation as “liminal” because we are in a time of discontinuous change.¹ Traditional maps no longer describe the territory. Many leaders are not only unclear about direction, but lack a sense of where they currently are located. For leaders in particular, this generates deep anxiety. After all, leaders are people others depend on for guidance; they are supposed to know where we are and where we are going.

Consequently we are in a growing crisis, and the temptation is to provide quick fixes and superficial answers. Answers and solutions, after all, will temporarily resolve anxiety and justify our existence. But quick fixes do not last, even while they provide psychological relief; we need to let go of some certainties while new questions form that will lead us forward. We need to stay in this liminal place until our eyes become accustomed to unfamiliar light. Alan Roxburgh described the challenge like this: When your prescription is up to date you don't think about your glasses. But when your prescription becomes dated you no longer see clearly. As our culture changes our perceptual maps become dated and the lenses we use become less and less helpful. The old lenses are not allowing us to see things "as they really are."²

Our first challenge is not to discover new maps, but to become friends of insecurity. Our first challenge is not certainty, but fidelity.³ “In quietness and rest you will be saved.” We need to discover a new dependence on the Holy Spirit. When we see with new eyes we can begin to form new maps.

¹ Alan Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publishing, 2005) 49. “Liminal” from the Latin “limina” means literally “threshold” and so signifies a time of transition.

² Ibid., 49

³ “We all have a hunger for certitude, and the problem is that the Gospel is not about certitude, it’s about fidelity. So what we all want to do if we can is immediately transpose fidelity into certitude, because fidelity is a relational category and certitude is flat, mechanical category. So we have to acknowledge our thirst for certitude and then recognize that if you had all the certitudes in the world it would not make the quality of your life any better because what we must have is fidelity.” W. Brueggemann quoted at the Emergent Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, September 16, 2004.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the continents of the world were understood by all to be fixed and immovable. But over time it became evident that certain data made no sense within that framework. Eventually a theory of continental drift was advanced, and not long afterward it was discarded in favor of plate tectonics. Today we realize that there is nothing “fixed” about the earth’s surface, and that eventually the Grand Canyon will be somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.⁴

The second challenge is to discover a deeper communal life. Some of the answers and perspective we need are already out there, because God’s future is always among God’s people. Eugene Peterson is correct to point out that the more active leaders become, the less community we have.⁵ Aye – there’s the rub, because we do need leadership, and we need it desperately. We need to know that we are not alone in these puzzling times, and we need to discover the wisdom that God has placed wisdom in the body; more than ever, the “eye needs the hand,” and the hand, the ear. We need one another. We also need a new imagination to frame leadership.

My task in this paper is to relate two elements and then suggest a synthesis, and on that basis offer a plan of action. The elements are these: the *practice* of governance in the Body of Christ, and the *telos* of spiritual formation.⁶ When we understand the relationship of these two elements, and when we contextualize these elements in our postmodern western context, we can begin to form a dynamic and interactive map that will guide us through changing territory. On

⁴ Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003), 180.

⁵ Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson. *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 203. Pointedly, Brueggemann writes, “Our problem today: the space for imagination to expand and take shape is inversely proportional to the speed at which we live. Driven hard and fast, we lack the time to allow alternate worlds and possibilities to form, careening past small turnings and exits, bound to follow the obvious straight paths of the present arrangement. Yet if we stop and wait, and close our eyes to the “buy now, take me now” images, we will begin to remember, new worlds will form and new exits will become apparent. Before change, comes waiting.” (*Hopeful Imagination*, 56-57).

⁶ See in particular William Cavanaugh and his arguments for the critical necessity of *telos* in *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

the basis of that interactive map and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can form a plan to shape environments that produce growth.

As we engage this process we need to do some unlearning before we can learn. We come with baggage of history and tradition, colored glasses, old lenses that shape our seeing in a particular context. Rubem Alves offers,

There is an age when one teaches what one knows.
But there follows another when one teaches what one does not know.
It comes, maybe now, the age of another experience: the age of unlearning.⁷

The Purpose of New Testament Governance

Ephesians, Paul's great letter on the church, is clear that God's purpose in giving leadership gifts is to build mature communities that perform and proclaim the good news of redemption to a lost world (Eph. 4:1-20). God has always been on a mission. If this is accurate, then the structure of faith communities must be congruent with that end. In traditional terms we would say it is all about reaching the world and making disciples, and at the same time we might reference a need for new wineskins. Jesus captures the first dynamic for us when He says "a disciple is like his master." The metaphor of new wineskins tells us that structures must be adaptable.⁸

By any measure formation is a huge challenge in the midst of an addictive culture that forms our attention, and in the context of an Empire that demands allegiance.⁹ Looking around the Christian West, one may observe frenetic activity in churches of every stripe, yet not much maturity. Divorce statistics, neglect of justice and the poor, abuse of power and addictive

⁷ Rubem Alves, *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 1.

⁸ The classic treatment is Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 1975).

⁹ I recall Walter Brueggemann's assertion that the church is captive to the politics of oppression and the economics of affluence in *The Prophetic Imagination*. See also Walsh and Kismet in *Colossians Remixed* (IVP, 2005).

behavior are as common among Christians as in the surrounding culture.¹⁰ Worse, these tendencies are as common among leaders and their families as among the general congregation. Perhaps Jean Vanier is right that, “community starts in mystery and ends in bureaucracy. They start with great enthusiasm and a love that surpasses all frontiers, and end up with a lot of administration and wealth, loss of enthusiasm and fear of risk.” Vanier states that our challenge “is to adapt [our] structures so that they go on enabling the growth of individuals and do not merely conserve a tradition, still less a form of authority and prestige.”¹¹

Leadership and Spiritual Formation: A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Chris Lowney’s study of leadership is intriguing.¹² Lowney comments on the Jesuits that

	Functional 20th Century Church Technical Skills	Emerging Missional Church Adaptive Skills
<i>Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stable * Predictable * Developmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Unstable * Discontinuous * Emergent
<i>Organizational Culture</i> <small>A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Hierarchies * Bureaucracies * Managers/Experts * Top-down flow * Strategic Planning * Linear * Fragmentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Networks/Teams * Dialogue/Conscious Learning * Cultivated Diversity * De-Centered * Converging Conversations * Bottom-Up * Non-Linear * Integration
<i>Leadership Functions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Manage People * Optimize Performance * Control Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Empower People * Nurture Teams * Invite Participation * Cultivate Environments

they eschewed leadership style, focusing instead on four unique values that created leadership substance: * self-awareness, * ingenuity, * love, * heroism.

The appeal to substance in these

four dimensions moves us beyond programmatic approaches. The limits of programmatic approaches are becoming increasingly obvious as we move into a historical period similar to the time of the founding of the Jesuit movement: rapid change, uncertainty, changing conceptions of corporate identity and changing valuation of success. While the industrial revolution framed leadership in technological terms and with technological ends, the postmodern world is demanding leaders who can innovate, move forward even when they don’t have all the answers,

¹⁰ This is why Reggie McNeal can opine, “We have a church that is more secular than the culture.” *The Present Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

¹¹ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 103.

¹² Chris Lowney. *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450 Year Old Company That Changed the World* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003).

and who stand on something more solid than clearly measurable ends.¹³ Leaders sometimes have to see beyond even their own lifetimes to assess their impact: to a city that exists in God's future.¹⁴ I recall a discussion on the word "master" in Gary Zukav's little book *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*...

"I was trying to find out what a "Master" is. The dictionary was no help. All its definitions involved an element of control. This did not fit into our image of the Dancing Wu Li Masters. Al Huang is a Tai Chi Master, so I asked him.

"That is the word that other people use to describe me," he said.

"My western education left me unable to accept a non-definition, so I began to read Huang's book, "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain." In the foreword by Alan Watts, I found what I sought. Alan wrote of Huang,

"He begins from the center and not from the fringe. He imparts an understanding of the basic principles of the art before going on to the meticulous details, and he refuses to break down the t'ai chi movements into a one-two-three drill so as to make the student into a robot. The traditional way . . . is to teach by rote, and to give the impression that long periods of boredom are the most essential part of training. In that way a student may go on for years without ever getting the feel of what he is doing."

"Here was the definition of a Master that I sought. A Master teaches essence. When the essence is perceived, he teaches what is necessary to expand the perception. The Wu Li Master dances with his student.. The Wu Li Master does not teach, but the student learns...."¹⁵

The question is this: how do we forge people of substance? How do we help people become self-aware, ingenious, loving, and heroic? And related, this: how do we lead and form others without creating dependence or hierarchy? These are the first questions of formation.

In Lowney's research the Jesuit approach examines leadership through a different prism, and refracted through that prism, leadership emerges in a very different light. Three differences stand out:

- We're all leaders, and we're leading all the time, well or poorly.
- Leadership springs from within. It's about who I am as much as what I do.
- Leadership is not an act. It is my life. A way of living.

¹³ At *Out of Ur*, the Leadership Magazine blog, Skye Jethani penned, "Great is Thy Effectiveness." He described the pressure for success that urban pastors experience, success measured by numbers and dollars. Online <http://blog.christianitytoday.com> Accessed Aug. 12, 2008.

¹⁴ Diagram adapted from Alan Roxburgh, Op Cit.

¹⁵ Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

Recently I asked the formation question of a small group of friends in Calgary, Alberta. These friends have banded together to form a new community called AWAKEN. We talked together about culture: that it is a cultivating force. *Culture forms us. Western culture has its own particular ways of forming us, and its own goals and measures—its own ideals – of formation.* Those ideals have to do with individuality, economics, politics, philosophy and religion. In short, western culture has its own vision of the good life, and it attempts to shape us into that understanding and set of practices.¹⁶

In contrast, the New Testament presents another ideal based on a very different understanding. It does not measure success by position or wealth, or growth in terms of numbers. Discipleship is centered on certain practices and outcomes: discipleship is kingdom-centered, character based and Christological. It is oriented around the incarnation and the Cross: love and sacrifice and the new community.

Our culture invites our attention to the things of this world, with self as the center. It invites an upward journey and has no place for sacrifice. That's one kind of formation. We are rooted in culture, and culture is a cultivating force (from the Latin, *cultivare*). In contrast, Jesus' definition of formation might look something like this: *spiritual formation is God's work in creating a new community ... a living temple ... of His loving presence in the world.*

Simone Weil wrote, "Culture is that which forms attention." To what should disciples be attentive? First, we must attend to the voice of the Master; second, to the world in which we live. We need this double attention so that we can engage our culture with the Person of Jesus and the good news of redemption. How do we shape this kind of attention? We shape it by forming an alternative culture.

¹⁶ William Cavanaugh writes, "Consumer culture is one of the most powerful systems of formation in the contemporary world... Such a powerful system is not morally neutral; it trains us to see the world in certain ways." Ibid.

How do we form an alternative culture? First, by knowing Jesus and being ourselves formed and transformed by the good news, and second, by modeling and teaching the dance of reflection and engagement.¹⁷ The most fundamental task of governance is thus self-leadership.

Every Leader is a Follower

The leader who isn't serving a vision larger than herself is not really a leader at all. He or she may be a grandiose manager, but not a leader. Jesus leaders serve a vision larger than themselves, and that vision generates their ability to make sacrifice. The compelling nature of the vision and sacrifice are contagious; they generate followers. Yet the goal of leadership is not to create followers of the leader, but to point beyond self to a transcendent vision. That vision is shaped by Jesus self-revelation and the gospel of God's kingdom. *Listen while you can so you may lead when you must.*¹⁸

There is a secondary sense in which a leader is a follower. A true leader learns to listen. He has one ear tuned to heaven, and another to earth. He takes the resources of one world and makes them available to another. She takes what she hears in one realm and proclaims it in another. Her role is priestly, prophetic and poetic.

¹⁷ How do leaders shape culture? According to Bill Frawley there are at least five foundational ideas. 1. Identity originates in alliances, not in individuals. Identity derives from what we borrow from others, and from how we differentiate, not from how we become like others. 2. Experiences are instrumental. Knowledge and practical competencies are best framed on a need to know level. When we discover our own limits and needs as we encounter circumstances beyond us, we also become engaged and impassioned about knowledge and change. Internships and mentorships are also a key part of the dance of learning. 3. Tension, uncertainty and failure are neither good nor bad, but necessary. Success at all costs is deadly to learning and growth, and tends to result in homogenized content and mechanistic programs. Instead, we need the wisdom that knows how to build from tension and uncertainty. This requires a foundational spirituality. 4. Reflection and action commingle. Action without reflection is dangerous (mere unprincipled acting). But reflection without action is pointless. Life circumstances shape neither pure knowers nor pure doers, but individuals in which these two are co-determined. 5. Practice has its own practice. All institutions and most movements are conservative and reproduce the conditions of their own existence in their activities, no matter how hard they try not to. The best way to resist this internal pressure is to cede control to participants as early as possible — give people voices, and encourage them to reflect on the interface between their learning and growth and the venues and field of that process itself. *Making Cultures: Dynamic Learning Communities and the LIFE Program*. University of Delaware, Fall, 2000.

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

In the priestly role the leader stands between the two worlds in a third place. She is neither in front of the people she leads, nor behind them, but above them and among them. In the prophetic role she stands behind them pointing the way forward. She follows along behind them, encouraging and empowering them to move forward, providing safety and security.

I always remember the regent's axiom: a leader, he said, is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.¹⁹

Prophets desire that the people of God rediscover the Word of God. "While poets invite dialogue in awareness and understanding, prophets call people to act on that knowledge. Liminality is the rich soil of prophetic imagination. It provides an environment where people are aware that they've lost their world and the connection with their most determinative stories."²⁰

In liminal times prophets do not develop strategies for returning to the past, but rather they cultivate an environment that enables reengagement with God's story. In a time when the gospel has been reduced to morals and values or to spiritual experience, it is difficult to encounter the sovereign Lord of history. But the prophet creates situations that compel the community to re-inhabit its foundational stories.²¹

The leadership of poets is less familiar to the modern observer. Poets "are not so much advice-givers as image and metaphor framers... What churches need are not more entrepreneurial leaders with wonderful plans for their congregation's life, but poets with the imagination and gifting to cultivate environments within which people might again understand how their traditional narratives apply to them today."²² Roxburgh notes that, "Poets make available a future that does not exist as yet; they are eschatologically oriented. From this

¹⁹ Nelson Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Big Bay Books, 1995).

²⁰ Roxburgh, *Op Cit.*, 169.

²¹ *Ibid.* 170.

²² *Ibid.* 166.

environment, a missional imagination emerges.”²³ Without missional imagination, faith communities become stuck moving in good Christian circles.

The Purpose of Leadership is Formation

The leader’s first attention is to God, and his second attention is to his own person. The leader who neglects his own growth will ultimately fail in every important task. The true leader’s resources come both from within and from above. But the leader who depends primarily on his own resources will ultimately find a desert within rather than a river. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote,

The man who is wise will see his life more as a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water until it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself.... Today there are many in the church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare...²⁴

This is potentially a counter-cultural practice both outside the church and within it. Many churches expect leaders to sacrifice everything for the greater good of “the ministry.” This is neither wise nor right. Strangely, the business world has already woken up to the destructiveness of this pattern, and business consultants are recommending balance in the life of the leader. Leaders who care for themselves model the same pattern for their co-workers, contributing to a healthier organization/family.

Perhaps the single biggest benefit of nurturing your soul as a leader is that it gives you perspective you can’t get any other way. Because the soul of a person is the equivalent of the hub of a wheel, staying centered is an important element of balance. Leadership tends to magnify our strengths and weaknesses, so a leader with a soul off center wobbles more noticeably than anyone else. Spiritual leaders bear the burden of keeping themselves in balance so that their perspectives are truth-oriented.²⁵

²³ Ibid. 167

²⁴ Sermon 18, N.2 “On the Song of Songs” (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984).

²⁵ Alan E Nelson, *Spirituality and Leadership* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 115.

The leader's attention is always divided between heaven and earth, and between self and other. His purpose is to focus all his attention on that to which the Lord is attentive. According to Ephesians the Lord's purpose is *to build a Holy dwelling place for His Spirit, a new people formed for Himself*. The leader's purpose is the same: to attend to the formation of a Holy people as the center of God's larger work of redemption.

The Stories

What stories will guide us as we seek to shape an alternative kingdom culture that will provide the soil for nurturing faithful communities of Jesus followers? The challenge as we come to the text is to hear the stories afresh. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so among you.**" (Mark 10:42-43)

The key words in this passage are well known to us: *doulos* (slave) and *diakonos* (servant). The incredible statement of Jesus, who identifies Himself with the prophetic title of "Son of Man"²⁶ (and therefore the awaited Messiah) is that He came to serve.

Our typical response is to equate service with leadership. Someone has wryly pointed out that we have many leaders who serve. What we need are servants who lead. Mark Strom's work "Reframing Our Conversation with Paul" underscores the need for leaders to follow Jesus example by stepping down in the world. He writes,

Evangelicalism will not shake its abstraction, idealism and elitism until theologians and clergy are prepared to step down in their worlds. Some might argue that since the world often shows contempt for the pastoral role, then professional ministry *is* a step back. But that is to ignore the more pertinent set of social realities. Evangelicalism has its *own* ranks, careers, financial security, marks of prestige, and rewards. Within *that* world, professional ministry *is* rank and status.²⁷

²⁶ The theology relating to the title, "Son of Man" is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁷ Mark Strom, *Reframing Our Conversation with Paul* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2000).

Jesus says to them, “You know how it is,” you see it all the time. You live in this world, and you have experience with its rulers; they lord it over you. He uses a combination of words to describe the model of ruling in the secular world: *kata* and *kurios*. *Kata* includes a sense of movement against or above. *Kata* authority is used to push and prod. The ones who lead this way call themselves *benefactors*. It is as if they would say, “We are leaders for your benefit, what would you ever do without us?” While they use others as their servants.

NOT SO AMONG YOU. Jesus makes this emphatic statement. Then he says something that must have been mind-bending. He calls his followers to an entirely new model, one with which they were equally familiar, but one that is less well known to us. He tells his followers that leadership in the new community leadership looks like *slavery*: like the most humble of service. Of course, Jesus modeled this himself, and without that experience it’s doubtful whether anyone would have understood.

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:5-11)

The key word in this passage is *ekenosen*, from which we get kenosis. The idea is “to completely remove or eliminate elements of high status or rank by eliminating all privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank.”²⁸

This passage feels much like an explication of Mark 10:40-45, combined with theological reflection on the incarnation of the Word of God. The writer is astonished that the King of Creation, the High Lord of the Universe, could become a mere human, leaving behind all privilege, protection, and power and subject Himself to weakness and humiliation, even death! The echo in the latter part of the passage in the hymn to humiliation is of the ascension glory

²⁸ Dawn and Peterson, Op Cit. 141.

awarded to Jesus and His triumph over death and over all the powers, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

In Mark 10 Jesus calls us away from *kata-kurios*, authority that is over, above, and against. Instead he models *diakonos*: the humble and sacrificial service of the slave. Here in Philippians 2 Paul spells it out. Leaders are called to kenotic service; humble, emptying, living for others. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” (1 Cor.1:18-19)

What appears as wisdom in our thinking about leadership and governance may not actually be wisdom at all. God has made the wisdom of this world foolishness. Our recent preoccupation with prediction and control, manifest through technologies related to church growth, is a case in point. We have had significant church growth, only to discover that numbers have no relation to formation. Meanwhile clergy have become proficient professionals, but proficient at what? Certainly not proficient at multiplying disciples, or the western church would look very different than it does today.²⁹

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-7)

The key words for consideration are *presbuteros* (elder) and *poimante* (shepherd). What we know is that the early occurrence of these words does not refer to an office, but to a function. An elder is one who exercises a particular function in the community, and that function is a

²⁹ Marva Dawn eloquently detailed the risks related to power in her chapter on the powers in *The Unnecessary Pastor*. In the following chapter Eugene Peterson points up the difference between *scientia* and *sapientia*, science and wisdom. Op Cit. 133.

caring and equipping task. The function is more like a familial role than leadership in a business or corporation, which fits God's end goals of formation and maturity. How do children learn? My own children have not always followed my instructions, but have often followed my example. When Peter calls us to be examples to the flock, he is calling our attention to *self-governance*. Leaders who attend too much to task and not enough to their own formation will be subversively undermining their fundamental task. This is a tremendous challenge, because leaders often measure their value by how busy they are.³⁰

In a leadership class at ACTS this past fall we spent time in the Greek of the New Testament. I confess to having had low expectations of this venture. After all, surely a seminary class on leadership will reinforce the expression seen in the dominant churches? It didn't happen that way.

Some of the words that came to be critical in our study were *diakonia* (to serve) and *proistani* (to care or rule). This latter word became a focal point, because the translation in the New Testament varies from "care" to "rule" and sometimes without good reason. In other words, the agenda, experience and presuppositions of the translators often has a serious impact... we bring our world and experience as lenses through which we view the text.

This *eisogetical* approach raises the hackles of serious Greek students, and Larry Perkins is a serious Greek student. He opened by noting that *proistani* is given two different semantic senses in the latest lexicons: i. to exercise a position of leadership, to rule or direct; ii. to have an interest in, show concern for, care for, give aid. How does one then determine which interpretation should be given? By context, and by the theological/ecclesial grid we use. This is where it gets interesting. Let's look at some examples.

³⁰ Worse, leaders chasing success neglect the most fundamental relationships they have: family. No wonder so many pastors eventually fall into sin. See Sally Morgenthaler, "Does Ministry Fuel Addictive Behavior?" *Leadership Journal*, Winter, 2006. Vol. XXVII, No. 1, 58. See also James Houston, *The Mentored Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

1 Thess 5:12 (KJV)

“To know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord”

1 Thess 5:12 (TNIV)

“Acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord”

Both translations are permissible. Which would you prefer and why?

1 Timothy 3:4 KJV

“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection”

1 Timothy 3:4 (TNIV)

“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him”

This is still a very strong statement. We could equally well translate, “he must care for his own family and see that his children obey him.” Conclusions we drew from this research include the following:

- i. those designated to provide spiritual leadership in the church do so under the general goal of providing care and devoting themselves to the interests of God’s people.
- ii. with the responsibility to care and nurture God’s people comes certain authority, but the primary dimension of spiritual leadership is care, not authority
- iii. if care is the dominant motif, then the role of elder could quite easily include the functions of oversight and service — some exercise care primarily through spiritual teaching and counseling, others through activities of practical assistance. These are not mutually exclusive.
- iv. the common word for authority in the NT (*exousia*) is never used in the context of elders, only apostles. While Paul often discusses his authority as an apostle, usually he asserts that he voluntarily refrains from exercising his rights in the context of the local church lest he seem to be profiting from his ministry.

Formation, Conversion and God’s Future

“Learn from me, how difficult a thing it is to throw off errors confirmed by the example of all the world, and which, through long habit, have become a second nature to us.”³¹

Formation requires conversion, and not only conversion out of the world system, but also *conversion out of the church system*.³² The structure and formative practices of the western church are based on a modern and dualistic worldview founded philosophically in the

³¹ Martin Luther, Table Talk.

³² In Karl Barth’s terms, we disengage in order to engage. This rhythm and process view of growth is nearly lost in our “progress” scripted culture.

Enlightenment, and politically in the Christendom compact. (This is less true of the Orthodox stream of course, and is true in different ways of the structure and practices within liturgical and sacramental traditions.) Western Cartesian individualism and western approaches to epistemology are fundamental lenses through which most evangelicals view governance, the gospel, the church and the world. Our worldview has a profound influence on our thinking and practice around formation. Any attempt to shift our practices and not merely our thinking is going to require something like a conversion. Rearranging the deck chairs merely demonstrates our ignorance of the way systems work. Alan Hirsch writes,

Although we hear about successful attempts to revitalize existing churches, the overall track record is actually very poor. A lot of energy (and money) is put into change



programs, with all the usual communication exercises, consultations, workshops, and so on. In the beginning things seem to change but the organization ends up settling back into something of its previous configuration. So, instead of managing new organizations, they end up managing the unwanted side effects of their efforts...

Ivan Illich was once asked what did he think was the most radical way to change society; was it through violent revolution or gradual reform? He gave a careful answer. Neither. Rather, he suggested that if one wanted to change society,

then one must tell an alternative story. Illich is right; we need to reframe our understandings through a different lens, an alternative story.³³

A paradigm is a set of core beliefs—a core narrative—which results from the network of conversations and which maintains the unity of the culture. Hirsch offers a diagram (left), which shows the secondary manifestations of culture (the petals), which result from the influence of the paradigm. Change programs, because we are essentially lazy and because we forget that we have lenses at all, tend to concentrate on the petals; that is, they try to effect change by tweaking the system. These efforts usually have limited success.

³³ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 190.

Church consultant Bill Easum is right when he notes that every organization is built upon “an underlying systems story.” He points out that “this is not a belief system. It is the continually repeated life story that determines how an organization feels, thinks, and thus acts. This systems story determines the way an organization behaves, no matter how the organizational chart is drawn ... It’s futile trying to revitalize the church, or a denomination, without first changing the system.”³⁴

It was no different in Jesus’ day. When it was time for the gospel to move from its original Jewish context to a new Greek context, it required divine intervention and profound discomfort for Peter. “The deepest order of change is epistemological change.”³⁵ Bill Buker talks about first order change, which is common sense change. This is the kind of change that happens when your spouse has to cut back at work. It will mean an adjustment in your family. Either you spend less, or someone works more. This is easy when there aren’t powerful personal and emotional dynamics involved. However, when someone has become dependent on something and it shapes her very identity, this first order strategy will not succeed. The second order of change involves becoming open to reevaluating the presuppositions that govern first order strategies. This is usually experienced as a crisis and one’s worldview may be in shambles. Paradox is at the heart of deep change. Consider Peter’s conversion in Acts 10.

Peter has a Hebraic worldview. This isn’t merely a lens through which he views culture and God, it’s a lens that determines *the entire shape of the Gospel*. Consider also that Peter has spent three years living day by day with Jesus, and that this story occurs months after the resurrection. Peter still hasn’t “got it.” *His understanding of church and kingdom is still culturally bound.*

³⁴ Bill Easum, *Unfreezing Moves* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 31.

³⁵ Bill Buker, “Spirituality and the Epistemology of Systems Theory.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2003. Vol. 31, No.2, 143-153.

Luke regards the conversion of Cornelius—which also involves the conversion of Peter—as a turning point in the missional identity of the church. He recounts the incident twice: in Acts 10 he explains what happened and how Cornelius responded; then in Acts 11 he retells the story from Peter’s perspective and describes how the church in Jerusalem responded.

The Gospel has already moved from Jerusalem to Samaria; now it is moving from the Jewish culture to pagan (Greek) culture. This amounts to turning an entire theological and cultural grid upside down and inside out. The idea that Gentiles could become followers of Christ was a fundamental challenge that led Peter and then the early church way beyond their comfortable boundaries, forcing them to re-examine their worldview and theological convictions. It was hard enough for Peter; it was tougher for the church, which had not seen the vision. According to Buker, epistemological shift involves three critical dimensions: 1. An ability to embrace paradox; 2. An inner quality of humility leading to surrender; 3. The willingness to grieve the loss of the previous world and previous identity

Our Western ecclesial expression has been rooted in a certain way of seeing the world; those lenses are no longer effective, and are now clouding our vision. We need new vision if we are to see and participate in the new things God is doing in our generation. We need to embrace paradox, admit how little we know, and be prepared to grieve the loss of the old world along with the identity we personally invested in those places and ways. The modern church was leader centered, program driven, dualistic, isolationist, consumer driven, seeker sensitive, information oriented, and attractional. As a result believers tend to be passive, self-centered, undisciplined, individualistic, and un-Christlike. To make the shift to de-centered, leaderful, formational, covenanted community and missional engagement, we need nothing less than divine intervention and conversion. We can’t merely graft a new theory of formation onto an old root; we need a new tree. Many believers don’t even see the need for spiritual formation.

Culture Forms Attention

I remember waiting up till it got dark
Searching till I found the brightest star
Making my wish with all my heart
But we grow up and so do all our dreams
Somehow without us even noticing
We set our sights on lesser things
Oh, to go back when we still believed...³⁶

“Culture is that which forms attention.” The question we asked earlier now returns: “How do we form an alternative culture in order to form attention to the things of God?” If we are formed by culture, we must shape the soil so that people can grow, because they will be formed by the culture that shapes their attention.

Our primary attention must always be given to Christ; otherwise, we end up following men. Jesus said, “*My sheep hear My voice.*” The church has lost much of its power because the voice it hears is not primarily that of its Shepherd. We are inundated with voices demanding our attention. We hear constantly how to do it -- faster, better, more. Could it be that we are really hearing a cultural voice disguised as the voice of the Shepherd? We are everywhere distracted, attracted, and enticed by our culture.

Richard Tarras has written that western culture is primarily a “market worldview.”³⁷ We in the west know the price of everything, the value of nothing. How will we become people with a different spirit, giving heed to a different Voice and living a different way? Gordon Cosby writes,

We forget that Jesus, 'though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.' Our culture promotes a constant filling up, but our disciplines will draw us toward greater emptiness, so that we can be better prepared for obedience and, ultimately, for finding our place in God's plan - finding true relevance.³⁸

³⁶ “What We Hope For,” by Carolyn Arends. From *Travelers*. Copyright 2001 Songs of Peer, Ltd.

³⁷ Richard Tarras, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

³⁸ Gordon Cosby, Interview in “Cutting Edge” Magazine. Vol. 5, No. 3, Fall, 2001.

Our culture promotes a constant filling up. The voices we hear say we need more, we need to go faster, we need it big, we need new, we need, we need... Our culture promotes addition and *addiction*. Perhaps the answer is subtraction.³⁹ Some of the questions that can guide new practices are these:

How can we slow down? How can we grow smaller and poorer?
How can we learn to listen? What can we subtract from our lives in order to give more attention to Spirit? What can we give away so we are less distracted by the things of this world? How do we learn to love? How do we learn hospitality?

One of the great passages on formation is Philippians 2:5-11.

In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

The key word in this passage is *ekenosen*, from which we get *kenosis*. The idea is “to completely remove or eliminate elements of high status or rank by eliminating all privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank.”⁴⁰ This passage feels much like an explication of Mark 10:40-45, combined with theological reflection on the incarnation of the Word of God. The writer is astonished that the King of Creation, the High Lord of the Universe, could become a mere human, leaving behind all privilege, protection, and power and subject Himself to weakness and humiliation: even death.

One of the keys in creating an alternative culture is creating space where people can learn to care for one another. The *ecclesial* context should be a place where we learn to love, and to move beyond the things that inhibit us from loving. Jim Wallis writes that, “Community is the

³⁹ Dallas Willard writes, “Sometimes entering spiritual disciplines is not so much a matter of doing something we have not done before as of doing it in a different way.” *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 355. See also James K.A. Smith and his suggestion of “counter-practices” in *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 105.

⁴⁰ Dawn and Peterson, *Op Cit.* 141. Dawn is quoting Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (NY: United Bible Societies, 1998).

place where the healing of our own lives becomes the foundation for the healing of the nations,” and “Community is a place to grow in truth, wholeness and holiness. The only way to propagate a message is to live it. That is why there can be no conversion without community. Community makes conversion historically visible.”⁴¹

Formation and Dispersion

To this point I haven’t said a word about the five-fold ascension gifts, those gifts God gives to equip the body for service (Eph 4:11-16). The entire passage on gifted service and the building up of the body is framed by love, which issues from God’s fullness. The food that nurtures most deeply is love.

Some of the critical words in the Ephesians passage are the words for equip (*katartismos*), build (*oikodomeo*), and service (*diakonos*). *Oikodomeo*, while translated “build,” does not have the technological and mechanical connotations we associate with it. This is a mysterious organic building, *which builds itself*. The root “*oikos*” means house... the church is God’s household, a relational construct and not a rational one. Is it possible that we were never intended to focus on leadership, design strategies for leadership, and hold seminars on leadership but instead focus on equipping all God’s people to maturity? What would the church look like if we developed a *leadership culture*?

The word for *equip* describes not a gift that some have, but rather *what each is called to do with the gift they are given*.⁴² In the Septuagint the word is used in Ezra 4:12 and pictures the work of a stone mason. Judah is in captivity, the walls of Jerusalem destroyed and the Temple has been leveled. Equipping is the work of picking up fallen stones and putting them back into order. In Romans 9:22 the equipper is a potter who fashions clay. In Luke 6:40 the equipper is a

⁴¹ Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 116.

⁴² R. Paul Stevens, *Equipping the Saints* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1985), 111.

parent who is a model for her children. Leadership functions in all these ways, has little to do with position or title and much to do with function: to present the whole body complete in Christ.

Stuart Murray in *Church After Christendom*⁴³ reflects that the New Testament letters were written to a missional movement. The dynamic of that movement was largely lost when the church became intertwined with the state in the fourth century (the Edict of Milan). There were no longer a peculiar people who lived an alternate life founded in a different kingdom: there was a single culture of “Christendom.” From that time until now the New Testament has been largely read as instruction to a settled and dominant religion. But what if we were to read the Second Testament, and Ephesians and its vision for leadership and equipping, as instruction to a missional movement? What if the roles of apostle, teacher, pastor, prophet, and poet were meant as much for the missional and *ex-ecclesial* context – the dispersed context – as the gathered context? God is active in the church gathered and in the church dispersed; but the dispersed activity must be carefully resourced since it is here that believers live and minister 24/7. All of life is formative. Any paradigm of formation that does not acknowledge that most of our discipleship occurs in dispersion is inadequate.

It’s intriguing to reflect on Israel’s earlier days as God followers in the desert. The tabernacle was portable, reflecting a people on the move with God. Unfortunately, our buildings show us to be isolated, insulated, and separated from the world that God loves.⁴⁴ We have evolved a fortress system because in Christendom we lost the sense of being on a mission with God. We even evolved a specific class of believer (missionary) to do the mission work for us.⁴⁵

The question of recovery of a dynamic and missional movement, the question of governance, and the question of formation are tied up together. What kinds of structures will suit

⁴³ Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 147.

⁴⁴ See also Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1975).

⁴⁵ Leonard Hjalmanson, *Toward a Missional Spirituality*. www.nextreformation.com

the culture of a missional, leaderful movement? They will have to be flexible, adaptable, de-centered and organic. Leadership will have to adapt to this shape if it is to empower deep formation and then a new engagement between the gospel and culture.⁴⁶

From Solid Church to Liquid Church

The imposition of a mechanistic and rationalized view of the *laos* of God limited the expression of God's life in His community in favor of the work of a few. The systems we rely on now often restrain change. As old forms decay, however, and alternative expressions are born we face the possibility of remembering a deep Reformation truth about vocation and ministry: *the work of the church is whatever its members are doing.*

When our leadership paradigm was the modern hierarchical one it was impossible to support the collaboration necessary for growth and flexibility. There were too many bottlenecks in the system. Peter Senge writes that, "we confront two critical challenges: how to address deep problems for which hierarchical leadership alone is insufficient and how to harness the intelligence and spirit of people at all levels of an organization to continually build and share knowledge."⁴⁷

Paul took ordinary images from life and filled them with new meaning. He used metaphors to enliven the imagination of God's people to a reality that was beyond comprehension. He appealed to apocalyptic imagination – the possibility that something new was coming into the world. The old church exists in the form it does because that form made

⁴⁶ In this connection the questions David Fitch asks are critical. He points to some of the weak thinking around the concept of leadership, found in expressions like Maxwell's "leadership is leadership" wherever it is found. Fitch asks, "Is it?" Does pastor = leader? Fitch shows how evangelicals use Jesus to prove their leadership theory. He questions Hybels "building a kingdom dream team" and "Jesus had a three year strategic plan." *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism and other Modern Maladies.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 76-77.

⁴⁷ Peter Senge. Communities of Leaders and Learners. From the 75th Anniversary issue of *Harvard Business Review*, September-October, 1997.

sense in the modern world. What forms make sense in the new world and can help us grow a culture that forms us into missional partners with a missional God?

Enter networks. They are related to smart mobs, like the RESONATE network. Networks cannot really be built or designed; they can only be supported and resourced. They are not engineered from the top down; rather they rise like mushrooms, from the ground up. They can't be controlled or manipulated, since they are by nature de-centered and control makes them into something other than networks.

The single largest challenge for our current lenses is that networks are about belonging. What we measure becomes important. In modernity we measured things like numbers and giving because they were easily counted. "Success" became whoever had the largest budget and the largest attendance; that measure had no connection to the gospel. But networks are successful if people connect.⁴⁸ How do you measure belonging? Joel Myers writes,

Spontaneity is difficult to measure. So many organizations do not measure it. And since they cannot measure it, it loses its importance. Yet people "count" the spontaneity in their lives all the time. They do not measure numerically, saying "I've had five spontaneous experiences today." Instead, they tell the story of the encounter:

"I met someone very interesting in the deli today."

"I had a great time at the concert. The crowd was really into it. We had such a good time."

"It was as if we had known each other all our lives."

Stories are the measuring tools of spontaneity, of community, and of belonging. Organizationally, we can measure the spontaneous experiences of community by listening for the stories people share. Then it is our responsibility to tell and retell the stories to create an organizational climate of belonging.⁴⁹

Networks will require us to rewrite what we thought we knew about leadership.

Rosemary Neave writes that, "This is where networks as a structure come into their own. They reflect a commitment to connect rather than to control; to share information rather than to ration

⁴⁸ More echoes of Eph 4:15: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

⁴⁹ Joel Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 79.

it; to disperse power rather than gather it into the center...”⁵⁰ How does one “build” a network?

Wheatley writes that leaders will need to know how to support self-organizing responses.

People do not need the intricate directions, time lines, plans, and organization charts that we thought we had to give them. These ... are what impede contributions. But people do need a lot from their leaders. They need information, access, resources, trust, and follow-through. Leaders are necessary to foster experimentation, to help create connections across the organization, to feed the system with rich information from multiple sources—all while helping everyone stay clear on what we agreed we wanted to accomplish and who we wanted to be.⁵¹

And Capra asks, how does one facilitate emergence? You facilitate emergence by creating a learning culture, by encouraging continual questioning and rewarding innovation. In other words, leadership means creating conditions, rather than giving directions.⁵²

The task of facilitating connections shifts leadership from an activist stance to a reflective stance. Leadership is about conversations and clarity: facilitating the potential of a living system. As Mort Ryerson, chairman of Perot Systems remarked, “We must realize that our task is to call people together often, so that everyone gains clarity about who we are, who we’ve just become, who we still want to be. If the organization can stay in a continuous conversation about who it is and who it is becoming, then leaders don’t have to undertake the impossible task of trying to hold it all together.”⁵³

A Curriculum for Christlikeness

Recently David Fitch, author of *The Great Giveaway*, questioned the use of mission statements in helping us mature and move forward as God’s people.⁵⁴ Alan Hirsch has told a similar story. As Hirsch and the team began to shift the culture of South Melbourne Restoration

⁵⁰ Rosemary Neave, *Reimagining Church* (New Zealand: Women’s Resource Center, 2006), 8.

⁵¹ Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco: Barret Koehler Publications, 1996), 26.

⁵² Capra, Op Cit. 113.

⁵³ Quoted in Wheatley, Margaret, “Goodbye Command and Control,” in *Leader to Leader Magazine*, July 1977.

⁵⁴ David Fitch, www.reclaimingthemission.com, January 23, 2007.

Community, they decided that mission and not ministry would be their center. This resulted in concrete steps, and in particular they did not develop a philosophy of ministry, but rather *a covenant and core practices*. Hirsch describes the crux of the problem like this: “Behind this thinking was the belief that when we talk about core values, the appeal is to the head. I have yet to see a set of core values in any church’s philosophy that I cannot agree with: they are motherhood statements in confessional communities.”⁵⁵

The wisdom that Hirsch and others found was that in a pluralistic, fragmented, individualistic and consumer oriented culture, apart from a covenant and communal practices, we remain separate stones and are never built into a living temple. Members pick and choose their practices and commitments. “Values” remain merely someone else’s ideas, opinion or interpretation of Christian living. The very structure and ecclesial expression that is so common in the west reinforces the fundamental values of consumer culture. *We cannot consume our way into discipleship. The ethos of consumption is at fundamental odds with the call to discipleship.* How do we help people see the problem, and grasp the solution? We need a curriculum for Christlikeness. Dallas Willard offers precisely that in *A Divine Conspiracy*.

Willard begins by stating the primary objectives, both negatively and positively. The primary objectives are NOT external conformity to Jesus teachings, or profession of perfectly correct doctrine. In contrast, the primary objectives ARE: “to bring apprentices to the point where they clearly love and constantly delight in that “heavenly Father” made real to earth in Jesus” and “to remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God, to free the apprentices of domination and enslavement to habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Hirsch, 46-47.

⁵⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 321-22.

With regard to the first question, Willard states that the problem is how to help people love what is lovely. We must bring God constantly before the mind and attention of the believer.

There are three main ways this is accomplished: 1) through His creation; 2) through his public acts on the scene of history; 3) through individual experiences of him by others and ourselves.⁵⁷

The second main objective is accomplished concurrently with the first: it is to break the power of patterns of wrongdoing and evil that govern our lives because of long habit in a world alienated from God. Willard teaches from the book of Colossians, the book he regards as the primary work of Paul on spiritual formation. Willard defines discipline as “any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”⁵⁸ Ironically, all the “spiritual” disciplines involve physical behaviors. This is natural since “the body is the first field of energy beyond our thoughts that we have direction over, and all else we influence is due to our power over it.”⁵⁹ The disciplines are simply ways of following Jesus concretely into his own practices. To “put off the old person” and put on the new is to engage in the same activities Jesus engaged in.

Willard lists four disciplines: two of abstinence and two of engagement. The first two are solitude and silence, and the second two are study and worship.⁶⁰ Willard notes that similar disciplines were “discovered” by all the great spiritual leaders. He lists the rule of Benedict, the exercise of Ignatius as two examples and then notes Book III of *Calvin’s Institutes* (on the Christian Life) as particularly helpful.

What is essential in such a plan was stated clearly by Alan Hirsch in his own attempt to shift the culture of his faith community from one of knowing to doing: a covenant and core practices. The covenant is the first step. A covenant is not the same as a contract, because it is

⁵⁷ Ibid., 326.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 353.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 357.

founded not in law but in grace and in loving relationships. I believe it is best if a covenant is formalized in writing simply because our culture regards a commitment as more serious when it is formalized on paper.

The practices themselves will vary. Willard makes the key point here: we must both “put off” and “put on.” We have to retrain ourselves, or as Gordon Cosby phrased it, we need to “detox from the culture.” Essentially, when we the two elements of a covenant and core practices come together for a specific local body of people we are creating an alternative kingdom culture together. Rodney Clapp captures the essence of this movement when he writes that,

Reclaiming Christianity as culture enables us to move from decontextualized propositions to traditioned, storied, inhabitable truths; from absolute certainty to humble confidence; from austere mathematical purity to the rich if less predictable world of relational trust; from control of the data to respect of the other in all its created variety; from individualist knowing to communal knowing and being known; and from once-for-all rational justification to the pilgrimage of testimony.⁶¹

In plain language, until a group of people covenant to a set of practices, they are not a church but merely *an aggregation of believers*. Imagine what the application of this perspective, if grasped by God’s people, would mean for the church in the west? I close with the words of Reinhold Niebuhr:

Nothing worth doing is completed within our lifetime; therefore, we are saved by hope; Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in the immediate context of history; therefore, we are saved by faith; Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.⁶²

⁶¹ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1996), 186.

⁶² Quoted in Ursula Niebuhr, Ed. *Justice and Mercy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), v.

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