

Poets, Pastors and Prophets: Governance, Leadership and Spiritual Formation in the Postmodern World

*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.*

Nelson Mandela in his autobiography *Long Walk To Freedom*.

by

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Introduction

Rapid change tends to generate insecurity and confusion. Every leader knows what that means: more pressure to solve problems, soothe anxiety, and generally chart a course forward. Unfortunately, that response is not necessarily helpful. Somewhere M. Scott Peck wrote,

Many people are either unwilling or unable to suffer the pain of giving up the outgrown which needs to be forsaken. Consequently they cling, often forever, to their old patterns of thinking and behaving, thus failing to negotiate any crisis, to truly grow up and to experience the joyful sense of rebirth that accompanies the successful transition into greater maturity.¹

With every crisis comes an opportunity for growth. Leaders often short circuit those opportunities by stepping into the breach too quickly. Perhaps we hope to justify our existence by supplying answers and solutions, however superficial or temporary. Eugene Peterson is correct to point out that the more active leaders become, the less community we have.² Aye – there’s the rub, because we do need leadership, and we need it desperately; but the leadership we need as we move forward is different from the leadership we have known.

My task in this paper is to relate two key questions: the practice of governance in the New Testament, and the *telos* of spiritual formation. 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). If this is accurate, then the structure of faith communities must be congruent with that end. 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.³ Looking around the Christian west, one may observe frenetic activity in churches of every stripe, yet not much Christian maturity; a plethora of programs, but not a lot of missional impact. Divorce statistics, neglect of justice and the poor, abuse of power and addictive behavior are as common among Christians as in the surrounding culture.⁴ 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

¹ M. Scott Peck, source unknown

² Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson. *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 203.

³ I recall Walter Brueggemanns assertion that the church is captive to the politics of oppression and the economics of affluence in *The Prophetic Imagination*.

⁴ This is why Reggie McNeal can opine that “we have a church that is more secular than the culture.” *The Present Future* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001)

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.”⁵

My purpose here is to examine NT governance in the light of God’s kingdom purpose in forming a people for Himself: a people set apart for a new way of living, as a light in the darkness, sent into the world to perform and proclaim God’s mercy. (I confess I have no great love for the term “governance.” Perhaps after digging in the Scriptures we can find a better word). The first step is exegetical and we’ll look at five passages: Mark 10:40-45; Phil. 2: 5-11; 1 Cor.1:18-31; 1 Peter 5:1-7; Ephesians 4:1-20. Then we’ll take a look at the neglected context of leadership: the community of God’s people. Community and family language dominates the New Testament: what does this mean for leadership? We’ll consider key metaphors: family of God, community, body of Christ, living temple. Then we’ll consider possible metaphors for leadership: builder, shepherd, gardener. Which makes the most sense of the NT data?

Seeing Our Seeing Through the Scriptures

The challenge as we come to the text is to hear the stories afresh. We come with our own history, and with a history of practice, and it is difficult to see our seeing. We are just as likely to do our exegetical work and then become like the man who looks in the mirror and sees his own face.

*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 with you.
Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.
For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45*

The key words in this passage are well known to us: *doulos* (slave) and *diakonos* (servant).⁶ The incredible statement of Jesus, who identifies Himself with the prophetic title of “Son of Man” (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,

Dying and rising with Christ *meant* status reversal. In Paul’s case, he deliberately stepped down in the world. We must not romanticize this choice. He felt the shame of it amongst his peers and potential patrons, yet held it as the mark of his sincerity. Moreover, it played a critical role in the

⁵ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989) 103.

⁶ The theology relating to the title, “Son of Man” is beyond the scope of this paper.

interplay of his life and thought. Tentmaking was critical, even central, to his life and message. His labour and ministry were mutually explanatory. Yet, for most of us, ‘tent-making’ belongs in the realms of missionary journals and far-flung shores. As a model for ministry in the USA, Britain or Australia, it remains as unseemly to most of us as it did to the Corinthians. At best it is second best.

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.⁷

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 which 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 for in the new community leadership looks like *slavery*.. like the most humble of service. Of course, Jesus modeled this himself, and without that experience its doubtful whether his followers ever could have understood.

From Kata to Kenosis

Phil. 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.*

⁷ Mark Strom, *Reframing Our Conversation with Paul*. (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2000)

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.”⁸

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 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.”
Where are the wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age?
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25*

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 discipleship and

⁸ Dawn and Peterson, Op Cit. 141

formation. Meanwhile clergy have become efficient professionals.⁹ Mark Strom highlights the issues and reminds us of the context of Corinthians.

Professionalism, even elitism, marks the sermon and the service and distinguishes clergy from congregation. Paul faced something similar at Corinth. The strong had transferred to themselves certain social and religious marks of rank and status—education, eloquence, a leader’s style, even clothing. They had also come to regard the fruits of Christ’s work—the Spirit and the evidences of his presence—as further marks of status, even ‘spiritual’ status. Paul would not tolerate this creation of new rank within the assembly. He urged the Corinthians to see what they had as *gifts* of grace. They must honour the least honourable. This was not conventional. This was not moral. This was not theology. This was not about words. This was the meaning of grace.

Paul urged leaders to imitate his personal example of how the message of Jesus inverted status. He was at pains to dissociate himself from the sophists, those travelling orator-teacher-lawyers of his day (1 Cor 2:1-5). Though undoubtedly educated and skilled, he did not imitate the sophists’ eloquence and persona. In so doing, Paul set himself on a collision course with the contemporary conventions of personal honour—and with his potential patrons. He refused to show favouritism towards individuals or *ekklēsiai*. The gospel offered him rights, but he refused them. Christ was *not* a means to a career. Yet the agendas and processes of maintaining and reforming evangelical life and thought remain the domain of professional scholars and clergy. Their ministry *is* their career.¹⁰

For most of the last century the church has taken its cues on leadership from worldly ways and means. Becoming an *ekklēsiai* leader meant pursuing a profession, obtaining a position in a church community that functioned more like a corporation, and accruing the privilege, power and status that came along with the position.

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.¹¹ Science is the realm of knowledge and information, wisdom relates to right living, the right application of knowledge in life. Where knowledge puffs up, wisdom grants us right perspective. Where information gives us power and control via distance and supposed objectivity, wisdom shows us how we are interdependent, related and connected under God to creation and humankind. Where science is often violent and amoral, wisdom tells us that we are called to peace and shows us that we are responsible to all humankind as recipients of grace and mercy. Where science calls us to share information, wisdom prompts us to become a teaching. Where church growth technologies undergirded by the scientific method call us to measure success by attendance, buildings and cash, the

⁹ See in particular the history of the clergy as discussed in *Missional Church*, chapter 7 (Darrell Guder, Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998)

¹⁰ Strom, Op Cit. 8

¹¹ Dawn and Peterson, Op Cit. 133

gospels call us to measure success by the other ABCs.. authenticity, belonging, and cultivating Christ. The church is “successful,” serving God’s purposes when its members become like Christ and then take Christ to the world.

1 Peter 5:1-7

*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.*

The passage continues to call younger believers to submit to elders, and for all to be clothed in humility one to another. 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 caring and equipping task. The function is more like a familial role than a business or corporation, which fits God’s end goals of formation and maturity.

Knowledge, Love and Equipping

The familial context is well understood in our time. Literally hundreds of thousands of hours of social and psychological research has been poured into understanding family systems. What we have learned, among other things, is that children don’t grow to maturity because of right information. This isn’t a new discovery. In a letter to Januaris, Augustine writes,

Use knowledge as a kind of scaffold by which to erect the building of love, which remains forever, even while knowledge is torn down. Knowledge, as a means to love, is highly useful; in itself, not as a means to such end, it has proven not only unnecessary but even harmful. I know, however, how your holy meditation keeps you safe under the shadow of the wings of God.¹²

I have had my own children for 19 years. Frequently I have instructed them to observe a certain kind of behavior or practice, only to find them practicing something else. My instructions appear to be rarely imitated. My example, on the other hand, is often copied. Children learn much less by what they hear, and much more by what they observe. Maturity and formation in a family are a result of right practice, growing out of solid character. The kind of people we are will influence growth much more than what we say, no matter how deep our convictions. When Peter calls us to be examples to the flock, he is calling our attention to self-leadership. Leaders who attend too much to task and not enough to their own formation will be subversively undermining their fundamental call. This is a tremendous challenge, because leaders are generally activists who measure their effectiveness by how busy they are. The busier

¹² Source unknown.

we are, the less likely we are to live from the center. But if we fail in this, how do we expect those who “follow” to be any different?¹³ James Houston writes,

When we are looking for help from the right kind of people, "teachers" are not enough... We forget that the nurturing and caring relationship is inherent in effective teaching. Wisdom, after all, is more than data processing. Activism that is devoted to a cause can also be a poor substitute for relationships, because it is too busy to cultivate friendship. The Greek philosophers were wiser when they stated that "thought is not meaningful without action; and action is not meaningful without friendship."¹⁴

Eph 4:11-16

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. 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.

The passage moves from unity (of the Spirit and of the faith verses 3-6) to diversity (verses 9-16).

The context is interesting: chapter 3 ends on the fullness of God (*pleroma*) and the love of Christ (19), and chapter 4 moves through gifted service to the fullness of Christ (*pleromatos*, 13) and love in verses 15 and 16. The entire passage on gifted service and the building up of the body is framed by love which issues from God’s fullness.

There are many important words in the passage: the words for the five-fold ascension gifts, and the words for equip (*katartismos*), build (*oikodomeo*) and service (*diakonos*). I want to point out that *oikodomeo*, while translated “build,” does not have the technological and mechanical connotations we associate with building. 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.

The word for equip has been much studied. Equipping is not a gift that some have, but rather *what each is called to do with the gift they are given*. There are three uses of the word in the New Testament which describe the equipping task:

katartismos to prepare Eph.4:12
katartisis being made complete 2 Cor.13:9

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ James Houston, *The Mentored Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002) 21.

katartizo (a verb used 13 times) to put in order, restore, prepare

Five different images are associated with equipping. According to Paul Stevens the usage in Ephesians has a medical history. In ancient Greece a doctor would equip a body by setting a bone, putting it back into right connection with the other parts of the body. In Matthew 4:21 the word has a double meaning in preparing nets: undoing the harm and damage of previous service and preparing the nets for further service.¹⁵

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 parent who is a model for her children. Leaders function in all these ways, both corrective and restorative, to present the whole body complete in Christ.

Images of the Church

The New Testament doesn't tell us a lot about the structure¹⁶ of the early Christian communities. Instead, a diversity of images represent the *ekklesia* in the New Testament: the family (or household) of God, the bride of Christ, a living Temple, and in 1 Peter 5 and John 10, God's flock. I note that all the images are organic; they are images of living systems. The most prominent images in Paul's letters is that of the body of Christ. The language Paul uses in his letters is relational, familial language.¹⁷ The implications of the body as a family are unity, mutual caring, belonging and growth. When Paul must express his authority he almost always uses family language, appealing to the communities relationally.

The family metaphor is also strongly present in the Gospels. Matthew uses the family metaphor to talk about equality (23:8-10) as does John (15-17 where loving unity mirrors the godhead). An image of the *ekklesia* that is unique to John's Gospel is the vine and branches (15). Bartlett points out that the vine and branches image is unique in that instead of emphasizing interdependence it relates every individual believer directly to Christ.¹⁸

All the metaphors are subject to a variety of uses. We might be quick to conclude that the use of the family metaphor and familial language points to an implicit authority structure. Families have fathers and mothers; flocks have shepherds; temples have builders. But the images are rarely used this way.

¹⁵ R. Paul Stevens, *Equipping the Saints* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1985) 111.

¹⁶ David Bartlett argues that the later letters are more concerned with structure than the early letters. Alternatively, Yoder maintains that the later letters are addressed to younger communities, which are more likely to need structure since maturity is lacking. *The Fullness of Christ* (Brethren Press, 1987)

¹⁷ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1994)

¹⁸ David L. Bartlett, *Ministry in the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stick Publishers, 2001) 101.

Instead, they are used to point to a relational and connected nature.. an organic reality. A flock has a shepherd, but the shepherd may be following and only rarely visible. Temples have foundations; again, they are implicit and not obvious. Families have fathers and mothers, but when Jesus uses the metaphor in Matthew 23 his emphasis is on a single divine Father and the equality of the brethren.

Worldviews and Governance

The organic nature of these images may be a clue to a neglected element. Physics and biological science has recently been subject to a major shift in paradigms: the lenses through which we view the world and which enable us to connect reality with meaning. The dominant paradigm in modernity was scientific, where we assumed that we could analyze nature, control variables and predict outcomes. In order to accomplish this we had to break nature into its most discrete parts, and we had to assume that the observer was not part of the process. This led to a dualism in our approach to knowledge and reality, enabling a disconnect between reason and relation, thought and feeling, subject and object, truth and troth. The world resembled a great machine in this Greek way of seeing, and the Church came to look less like a community and more like a bureaucracy. We believed that growth was in our control. We trained managers, we didn't want leaders.¹⁹

Leadership	
MODERN	POSTMODERN
• Manager & CEO	• Spiritual Sage
• Giving Orders	• Listening
• Individual Action	• Communal Process
• Top Down	• Bottom Up

Today we are recovering a more holistic and Hebraic worldview. This recovery impacts our thinking in virtually every area of our existence, including leadership and community. If the *ekklesia* is less like a machine and more like a living system, then environmental factors become critically important in growth. Moreover, we are discovering that we cannot separate subject and object so cleanly. There is no such thing as objectivity: every observer affects the reality she observes. There is mystery in growth (1 Cor. 3:6). Leadership shifts from hierarchical and decision making conceptions to process and relational conceptions. Connections and participation become key goals. We learn to surrender control to the Holy Spirit and receive the kingdom as a gift.²⁰

¹⁹ Fritjof Capra writes that, "Management is about stability; leadership is about change." *The Hidden Connections*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

²⁰ See especially George Hunsberger's discussion in *Missional Church*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998) 94-95.

Too many leaders are bottlenecks in a living organism, insisting that all information flow through them and that they are involved in every decision. Leadership, however, has little to do with who makes decisions. Instead, biblical leadership is about *forming culture and drawing attention to God*.

*Image adapted from the work of Rex Miller in
The Millennium Matrix.*

The New Testament doesn't give us much information on the structure of communities because the *ethos* is more important than the form. It is the culture of the communities and the life of Christ they express that is critical.²¹

Spiritual Formation	
MODERN	POSTMODERN
• Primarily Through Presentation/Teaching	• Primarily Experiential/ Participatory
• Words as Symbols	• Images as Symbols
• Reduction of Mystical	• Mystery co-exists with Reason
• Individualistic	• Communitarian
• Personal/ Inward	• Practices/ Attention

When managers encounter a problem, they look for solutions. They focus on the problem and attempt to control a specific set of variables to achieve desirable outcomes.²² This isn't the case with leaders. Leaders don't see problems, but opportunities. Leaders see problems as opportunities for growth. This is why leaders tend to thrive in messy, unpredictable environments – environments which make managers and bean-counters crazy.

According to Kilpatrick, Falk and Johns²³ there are three primary understandings of leadership. First, leadership as an ability – a set of traits or behaviors that can be taught. Second, a relationship - interactions where leaders and collaborators work toward change. Leaders have greater power and thus greater influence. Third, leadership as a dynamic and collaborative process - roles are not defined and leadership is a group process and is created as individuals and groups interact and collaborate. This third definition fits with an organic reality, and was impossible to express in the modern world. Sadly, leaders in the modern church were generally managers, technologists, or therapists.²⁴

²¹ 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, MI: Baker Books, 2005) 76-77.

²² I have in mind a scene in Patch Adams where the composer holds up his hand and asks Patch to count his fingers.. Patch gives the standard answer because *he fails to look beyond the problem*.

²³ Sue Kilpatrick, Ian Falk, Susan Johns, "Leadership in Dynamic Learning Communities." University of Tasmania Press, 2001.

²⁴ Dawn and Peterson, Op Cit. 60. See also Bartlett, Op Cit. 15.

In times of rapid change those who are protecting territory are soon left behind. A changing environment demands flexibility and adaptability, something that is beyond most managers and beyond many organizations. As John Paul Ghetty is said to have opined, “In times of rapid change, experience is our worst enemy.” When the goal posts are moving we don’t need those with well refined skill sets, we need listeners and learners: those who can forge collaboration between diverse groups and harness the energy of entire communities. We need edge-walkers and connectors. We need new imagination. We need wider paths for information flow and feedback. We need leaders who are more like poets than managers, “poets who speak against a prose world.”²⁵

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 have constructed now restrain change; another witness to the influence of the powers. As old forms decay and die, however, and alternative expressions are born we face the possibility of acknowledging a deeper 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. As Thomas Friedman pointed out, “The best companies are the best collaborators... [because] the next layers of value creation are becoming so complex that no single firm or department can master them alone.”²⁶ Similarly, 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.”²⁷

New Metaphors for Ekklesia

Paul took ordinary images from life and filled them full of prophetic content. He used those metaphors to enliven the imagination of God’s people to a reality that was a beyond their comprehension. He birthed apocalyptic imagination – the possibility that something entirely new was coming into the world.

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001)

²⁶ Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005)

²⁷ Peter Senge. “Communities of Leaders and Learners.” From the 75th Anniversary issue of *Harvard Business Review*, September-October, 1997.

	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 to 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> <small>adapted from Roxburgh, The Sky is Falling, 2006</small>	<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

The old church exists in the forms it does because, to some extent at least, those forms made sense in the modern world. In the world that is rising those forms no longer make

sense, and anyone who clings to them will be fitting flat tires on an old bus.

Diagram adapted from Roxburgh, The Sky is Falling, 2006

New leaders will need new language to express the reality they see. For most of them it will be like fish swimming in water. They were born in this new world and much of it is simply intuitive. (I worry for some young leaders who are being shaped by old expressions of church).

Networks partake of some of the most intriguing qualities of emergence. 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. Networks will explicitly resist such attempts, since central control makes them into something other than networks. Consequently, those attempting to control them are going to be very frustrated. In these transitional times we will need some established leaders in place who understand these things, otherwise the transition is going to be very painful for many of the young and rising leaders.

Perhaps the single largest challenge is that networks are about belonging. What we measure becomes important. We measure things like numbers and giving because they are the easiest to quantify. Success is whoever has the largest budget and the largest attendance. But networks are successful if people connect.²⁸ How do you measure belonging? Joel Myers writes,

²⁸ 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."

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.²⁹

Networks will actually 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 it; to disperse power rather than gather it into the center...”³⁰ Inevitably, this involves spontaneity and chaos. Richard Ascough writes that, “The “chaos” aspect of chaos theory is not understood as synonymous with confusion, disarray, and pandemonium. That is, we should not picture a four-year-olds’ birthday party. Rather “chaos describes a complex, unpredictable, and orderly disorder in which patterns of behavior unfold in *irregular but similar* forms.”³¹

So.. how does one “build” a network? Margaret Wheatley, Peter Senge, Fritjof Capra, Clay Shirky.. these are the “gurus” of the new order. 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 not how people accomplish good work; they 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.”³²

And Capra asks,

²⁹ Joel Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003) 79.

³⁰ Rosemary Neave, *Reimagining Church* (New Zealand: Women’s Resource Center, 2006) 8.

³¹ Richard Ascough, “Chaos Theory and Paul’s Leadership Style.” *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol.1, No. 2. Fall, 2002. 21-43

³² Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco, CA: Barret Koehler Publications, 1996) 26

“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.”³³

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.”³⁴

New Metaphors for Leadership

The first culture-forming activity of humankind is displayed in Genesis as language making: Adam names the animals. Is there a clue here about the spiritual relationship between leadership and imagination? Until recently it was believed that science could solve every problem. In the face of surprising complexity and widening mystery Einstein opined that “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Old theories of leadership assumed that leadership was about command and control. Leaders are those who make decisions. In the rising world where complexity increases exponentially year by year no one person and often not even an entire team have enough information to make the right decision. Rather than merely solving problems, we have to be willing to allow new and untested structures to emerge. Postmodern leaders don’t mind fluid structures and are comfortable with chaos because they are more interested in finding meaning than in building structures or establishing order. Margaret Wheatley comments that “We instinctively reach out to leaders who work with us in creating meaning.”³⁵ Wilfred Drath and Charles Paulus pursued this direction in a book titled “Making Common Sense: Leadership As Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice.”³⁶



³³ Capra, Op Cit. 113

³⁴ Quoted in Wheatley, Margaret, “Goodbye Command and Control,” in *Leader to Leader Magazine*, July 1977. See also Capra, *Creativity and Leadership in Learning Communities*, “The most powerful organizational learning and collective knowledge sharing grows through informal relationships and personal networks -- via working conversations in communities of practice.”

³⁵ Op Cit. 21

³⁶ Wilfred Drath and Charles Paulus. *Making Common Sense*. Center for Creative Leadership, 1994.

Drath and Paulus argue that the old understanding of leadership rested on a set of assumptions about human nature and motivation. The dominance-cum-social-influence view assumes that humans are naturally at rest and that they need a motivation force to get them going. The meaning-making view assumes that people are naturally in motion, always doing something, and that they need, rather than motivation to act, *frameworks within which their actions make sense*.

From this theory appears an important difference and a powerful advantage. When we no longer see dominance and social influence as the basic activities of leadership, we no longer think of people in terms of leaders and followers. Instead, we can think of leadership as a process in which an entire community is engaged. With Peter Senge we might argue that leadership “is the capacity of the community to bring forth new realities.” We could then locate leadership in a matrix or network or community – *the body of Christ*, for example. Such a way of seeing would help us move beyond the professional ministry model, which has acted as a powerful bottleneck for ministry and mission. Furthermore, we could disentangle power and authority from leadership. Authority is a tool for making sense of things, but so are other human tools such as values and work systems.

Scott Cormode considers three metaphors for leadership: that of shepherd, builder, and gardener.

“Should a pastor be an entrepreneurial leader or a loving shepherd,” the popular Christian magazine asked, “a person who casts a vision or cares for broken people?” Warning readers not to “model their style after the megachurch pastors [who act like] CEOs,” [one leader] concluded that his congregation grew not because of “my ability as a speaker or administrator, but [because of] my role as a servant-shepherd.”

The second respondent, of course, championed the Builder role for the leader. He did so by focusing not on the well-being of particular individuals but on the health of the entire congregation. He also emphasized results over process. “The bottom line,” he said (using a phrase common among Builders), “is that leaderless organizations don’t work.” Callahan says pointedly, “Local congregations need more leaders and fewer enablers.”

Robert Dale in *Leadership for a Changing Church* discards both the Shepherd and the Builder model. “An entirely different leadership paradigm is arising,” he proclaims. “Leaders now make sense rather than make [decisions]. More accurately, they make meaning.” This is what Max De Pree meant when he said, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”³⁷

³⁷ Scott Cormode. “The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd and Gardener.” *Journal of Religious Leadership*. Vol.1, No.2. Fall, 2002. 69-104.

@Cormode	Builder	Shepherd	Gardener
Inspires action by	Making Decisions	Empowering People	Making Meaning
Approach to Leadership	Organizational approach	Pastoral Care approach	Homiletic approach
Emphasizes	Roles and Responsibilities	Relationships	Vocabulary and Stories
View of Congregation	Structure	Community	Culture
Biblical Precedents	Nehemiah, Jethro	Jesus as Good Shepherd	Nathan with David

While in the time of the New Testament both building and shepherding was an organic task, not abstracted from life but very rooted and relational, today builders are primarily technologists and shepherds are primarily therapists. Eugene Peterson has pointed out the limits of each of these modes.³⁸ Leadership with a view to formation is about creating a certain kind of environment, or culture. Culture is a cultivating environment that forms people in a certain way. In the west it is extremely apparent that believers are largely formed by secular culture.³⁹ As a result we have given more attention to management than to leadership, more attention to technology than to poetry.⁴⁰ Attention to soil and cultivation of life is the activity of gardeners and poets.

The dominant cultural frame of our time for leadership can be summarized in a single word: the hero. Responding to this cultural limitation in an interview in 2001 Margaret Wheatley argued that we need to move from hero to host. In an interview with the Robert Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership she said,

“We need to move from the leader as *hero*, to the leader as *host*. Can we be as welcoming, congenial, and invitational to the people who work with us as we would be if they were our guests at a party? Can we think of the leader as a convener of people? I am realizing that we can’t do that if we don’t have a fundamental and unshakable faith in people. You can’t turn over power to people you don’t trust. It just doesn’t happen. The other part about the timelessness of servant-leadership is, what do you do if you can’t control events? There is no longer any room for leaders to be heroes. I think one really needs to understand that we have no control, and that things that

³⁸ Dawn and Peterson. Op Cit. 60

³⁹ This is the fundamental thesis of David Fitch latest work, *The Great Giveaway*. 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.” Fitch notes that the word “leader” is avoided in the New Testament, and instead a new word is used: *diakonia*. Words that suggest a relationship between ruler and ruled were unusable in the new community. 77-78.

⁴⁰ Fritjof Capra opines, “management is about stability; leadership is about change.”

we have no control over can absolutely change our lives. I think it will take a little while for Americans to really accept that there is no control possible in this greater interconnected world. There are lots of things we can do to prepare, but there is no control."⁴¹

Culture Forms Attention

As Simone Weil pointed out, "culture is that which forms attention." Leaders must give attention to shaping cultures, alternative cultures which are alternative communities, islands of kingdom life which foreshadow the kingdom which is coming. This alternative culture will in turn form the attention of those within it – attention directed not to human leaders, but to God. Alan Roxburgh in *The Sky is Falling*, describes four types of leader: poet, prophet, apostle and pastor. The poet is one type of leader who has largely been missing in the modern church, for reasons described above.⁴²

The poet, like Adam, helps us make sense of our experience. The word in the prologue of John tells how Jesus "became flesh and lived among us." In a similar way, the poet shapes words so that what was hidden and invisible becomes known. Poets remove the veil and give language to what people are experiencing. This is only possible when the poet him/herself lives within the traditions and narratives of the people - "living reflexively in the traditions...The poet listens to the rhythms and meanings occurring beneath the surface."⁴³ But the poet also has a prophetic bent: "poets immerse themselves in the multiple stories running beneath the surface of the culture.. feel the power of these stories and critique their claims and pretensions on the basis of the memory and tradition of the community."⁴⁴

The leadership of poets, however, is not expressed in a modern manner. 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."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Online <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/herotohost.html>

⁴² Alan Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publications, 2005) 166.

⁴³ Ibid. 164

⁴⁴ Ibid. 165

⁴⁵ Ibid.166. 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

Finally, Roxburgh notes that, "poets make available a future that does not exist as yet; they are eschatologically oriented. From this environment, a missional imagination emerges."⁴⁶

Without missional imagination, faith communities become stuck moving in circles. The purpose of formation, however, is to make known the grace of God to all creation. The congregation that exhibits the fullness of Christ inevitably performs and proclaims the gospel. In the new world that is dawning, we will need gardeners of all types.. and we will need poets, pastors, apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers who are embedded in the community, empowering all God's people to do the work of ministry. If these leadership functions are often transparent or invisible, like yeast hidden in dough, powerfully influencing change by birthing a new world, all the better.

One final image comes from a study in Tasmania on leadership in dynamic learning communities. The writers describe the importance of a certain leadership type in the process of change: "boundary crossers..." These people bridge certain groups and interests, they legitimize wider partnerships, and their interpersonal skills strengthen key relationships across boundaries. Interestingly, one of the key traits of these people is their ability to speak multiple languages: the language of business and school in this case.⁴⁷

So these people are edge walkers, they speak multiple languages, and when they exist in our communities we sometimes wonder if they are "in" or "out." But their function on the margins is critical to the life of our communities, helping to keep the boundaries permeable so that air can get in and life can flow out. I believe this role is especially needed when communities have been ghettoized and isolated for

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.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 167

⁴⁷ Kilpatrick, Falk and Johns, Op Cit. 6

too long, thus sacrificing bio-diversity. As the systems theorists tell us, “equilibrium is death.” Boundary crossers challenge the status quo indirectly by opening channels of growth and interaction on the margins.

More, and this relating to the work of Peter Senge and associates..in legitimating wider partnerships boundary crossers enable accelerated learning. If you know anything about the nature of missional imagination and embedded leadership and the absolute necessity of new imagination in this strange time of transition we are in, then you know how important this piece is.

Ekklesial Leadership After Christendom

“Strictly speaking one ought to say that the church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it...” David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

Stuart Murray in *Church After Christendom*⁴⁸ 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. 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 again read the NT, 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-ekklesial context – the dispersed context – as the gathered context? Frost and Hirsch use APEPT to refer to "five fold," apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They make the argument that "to each one grace has been given" and "he gave some to be" in Ephesians 4 applies the APEPT giftings to every believer: every believer has one of the APEPT gifts.

Furthermore, they locate these gifts within two matrices: an inner leadership matrix and an outer missional-ministry matrix. Not all apostles will hold leadership positions in the church. Not all prophets will be recognized as such or exercise their gifting in a way that moves the entire community forward. But all five gifts are necessary "to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up." There is no either/or dualism in charismata that separates the people of God into clergy

⁴⁸ Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004) 147.

and laity, and no separation between the sacred world of Sunday and the secular world of Saturday. God is active in the church gathered and in the church dispersed; but the dispersed activity is more primary since it is here that believers live and minister 7 days a week.

Frost and Hirsch run the five gifts through the grid of organizational and social research. While at first glance this may seem pedantic, it is really helpful. They make the following connection:



- entrepreneur/innovator - the apostle
- questioner - the prophet
- recruiter - the evangelist
- humanizer - the pastor
- systematizer - the teacher

This is helpful for two critical reasons:

- it pushes us to see the function of these gifts in any church team and both inside and outside the walls
- it moves toward disentangling these biblical terms from the muck and mire of cultural religion

In the modern setting we were very enamored of pastors and teachers, and lost the missional ability to innovate. The apostles have been thought dispensable by the management culture of modern clergy. Then we neglected to listen to the prophets, who had their ears attuned to both God and the culture, and we likewise marginalized the artists and poets, who are some of the prophetic among us and are often apostolic.

Frost and Hirsch⁴⁹ note that organizational research finds definable stages in organizational life in relation to leadership. Young movements are full of prophets and visionaries, people with little vested interest in old forms and lots of energy for risk and experimentation. But as movements become organizations, the builders and systematizers take over: establishing relational connections, consolidating the group. Prophets and poets are marginalized. Eventually administrators rule, and the organization shifts to maintenance mode. Little change or growth is possible, and the organization dies.

⁴⁹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 166f.

There is a fifth role that Roxburgh recalls in *The Sky is Falling*. He takes a cue from Lawrence Miller and writes about an abbot-type figure that Miller describes as “the synergist” ... a leader with the capacity to unify diverse and divergent leadership styles around a common sense of missional vision for a specific community.” (155) In times of transition and in particular in times where we participate in multi-communities and multi-cultures, the synergist will be greatly needed.

Missional Imagination

In 2001 my wife and I started hosting meals downtown among the poor in Kelowna. We met a native man who had spent time in a residential school; he had good reasons to hate the church. Our group didn't call itself a church, though it was that for us. One evening after a meal in our home we told him about a different Jesus than the one he thought he knew. He let us pray for him, and when the Holy Spirit came on him he looked a lot like a drunk Indian.. but for the first time in his life he wasn't drunk with wine.

A group in Kelowna right now is dreaming about creating a third place downtown: a neutral space in a café for music, conversation, and films where spiritual seekers can meet Christians in a safe place. We take the light out into the darkness, we don't hide it under a cover. We spread the salt out so it can do some good. Jesus entered our world; the kingdom broke into our reality. Jesus didn't challenge us ascend to heaven. We have to become Jesus out there for others.

When Jesus ascends to the Father it becomes possible for him to fill all things. He sends His Spirit so that the church, His body, becomes the living tabernacle. We are "God's house," (Heb.3: 6; 1 Tim.3: 15), a "holy temple," (Eph.2: 21; 1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6: 16), a "dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph.2: 22; 1 Peter 2:5), a building not made with hands. We become the embodiment of God's Presence in the world.

In Acts 7 Stephen is stoned when he argues that God does not live in buildings made with hands but in His people. Alan Roxburgh relates the lovely scene in John 20 where Jesus enters the room. The doors are shut, its evening, and the disciples are in hiding. Suddenly the risen Christ stands among them.

“Peace be with you.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so send I you."

Jesus does three things in this passage. First, He speaks *shalom. Peace be with you.* Next, he demonstrates that He is not a ghost, but the Risen and incarnate Lord of creation. Third, He commissions them into mission and breathes the Spirit upon them. What Jesus is doing is recapitulating the promises of God in the OT around the formation of a new creation. The breath of the Spirit re-enacts the Spirit's moving over the deep in *Genesis* to form creation.

In other words, in that locked room among frightened men and women, Jesus re-constitutes God's new creation for the sake of the world. The key point is that the Spirit of creation - new creation - is poured out among the ordinary men and women who comprise what we call the church.

I began this paper by noting that governance.. the order and structures of the church.. are determined by *telos*: what the church is meant to be and become. Spiritual formation is ekklesial. The definition I work with is this:

Spiritual formation is the work of the Spirit in creating a new community .. a living temple ..of His loving presence in the world.

How do we incarnate the loving presence of God in the world? We have built so much of our being in the world around our fortresses, hoping that people would come to us. Jesus went out among the people. . If we aim at ministry we don't have time for mission; but when we aim at mission we are forced to do ministry. There are so many people who need Jesus who will never feel they can enter the doors of a church..

Remember, it isn't the church of God that has a mission in the world, it's the God of Mission who has a Church in the world.

Ekklesial Anarchy? or Resetting the Boundaries

"Nothing is more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than achieving a new order of things." Machiavelli

If our lives as God's people are to be lived out in full view of the world, we need to take conscious, deliberate steps to be sure this is happening. This is why God is breaking down our definitions and resetting the boundaries.

A visitor to an Australian outback cattle ranch was intrigued by the seemingly endless miles of farming country with no sign of any fences. He asked a local rancher how he kept track of his cattle. The rancher replied, "Oh that's no problem. Out here we dig wells instead of building fences."...

Becoming missional has to do with where the boundary markers are being placed as we define the church. What is in-bounds? What is out-of-bounds? The boundary markers for the church should be determined by where the gifts and callings of God's people take them.

If believers were encouraged and enabled to seize the opportunities God brings their way in the neighborhood and across society, and if they could proceed confident of support from others in the body, the church would be redefined. It would change from being a bounded set to being a centered set. Now what does that mean?

We are accustomed to defining the church within a certain circle. We work at clarifying who is in, who is out; what the leadership structure is to be and not to be; what we believe and do not believe; which activities belong, which do not; and what behavior is appropriate and what is not. So the line between insiders and outsiders is clearly drawn.

Paul Hiebert calls this kind of thinking "bounded-set thinking." That is, there is a boundary that sets the standard. One either qualifies or is rejected; it's pass or fail. We need to move from bounded-set thinking to what Hiebert refers to as "centered-set thinking" in our understanding of the church.

In 2001 we left our faith community because it had become Christian theatre. We didn't know where we were going or what we would do, but we heard Jesus say "Come, follow Me." We ended up doing a different kind of church among the poor in the downtown core.

In a centered set, what counts is how each member is moving in relation to the center (Jesus). The focus is upon the center, and each individual is in dynamic relationship to it. Belonging, in this case, is

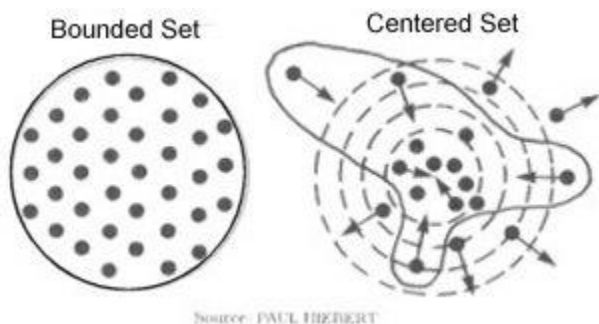
not a matter of performing according to an agreed-upon profile, it is a matter of living and acting out of commitment to a common center.

The focus is on the center and on pointing people to that center –Jesus. Process is more important than definitions. Centered-set thinking affirms initiatives that would otherwise not find a place.

We need to reward initiative and creativity, as opposed to fearing it. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice,” We need to be teaching people to listen for Gods voice, day by day, to be sensitive to opportunities where they live and work... we need to encourage each other not to wait for someone to tell them what to do or for a program they can fit into.

It is not that bounded sets are always bad and centered sets are always good. Boundaries do exist. Salvation is a bounded set. One is either in Christ, or not in Christ. Discipleship is a centered set. To be a disciple is to be constantly moving toward the center, which is Christ.

What we are talking about can be visualized by the following diagram.



Source: PAUL HEDBERT

Jesus is the Center

If we use this model, our understanding of what is the center must be very clear. The church is not that center. The center is Jesus: the Head of the body. All members of the body are to function in relation to the center: Christ.

Remember Pentecost? God's people are those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is transforming their character and giving them gifts they are to use in reaching out to a lost world. Exercising our gifts and functions, according to the enabling of the Holy Spirit in response to needs and opportunities, will determine the boundaries.

I'm not advocating everyone moving in whichever direction he or she pleases, doing whatever strikes them as a good idea at the moment. I'm talking about the difference between form and function. In the New Testament ministry was accomplished by believers exercising certain functions. Form and

structure followed, giving substance and permanence to their efforts. It is that process that needs to be repeated and reproduced, not the existing forms

In the New Testament ministry was accomplished by believers exercising certain functions. Form and structure followed, giving substance and permanence to their efforts. It is that process that needs to be repeated and reproduced, not the existing forms.

Let's face it, we get addicted to forms. What begins as water soon becomes cement. Dave Gibbons reports on an interview with his favourite hero, Bruce Lee. Lee explained his philosophy about life and his martial-arts craft this way: "You put water into a cup. It becomes the cup. You put water into the bottle. It becomes the bottle. The water can flow. The water can crash. Be water."⁵⁰

Water gives life; the form is immaterial. Water, the same as words, is shaped by its context. Water takes on the form of the container. The church had one kind of form in the modern world, it needs a new form in the new culture. We need new wineskins.

In the bounded set, it is clear who is in and who is out based on a well-defined boundary --usually moral and cultural codes as well as creedal definitions.. but it doesn't have much of a core definition beyond these boundaries.

The bounded set is *hard at the edges, soft at the center. It's like the traditional ranch with high fences*. Fences keep my cattle in and keep everyone else's cattle out. Fences are mostly about possession.

The centered set, on the other hand, is like the Outback ranch with the wellspring at its center. The Outback ranch has no fences, just a water hole. We know that we don't have to control the animals... they always come back for water. The centered set has very strong ideology at the center but no boundaries. *It is hard at the center, soft at the edges*. In the centered set lies a clue to the structuring of new missional communities in pm culture.

The traditional church makes it quite difficult for people to negotiate its maze of cultural, theological, and social barriers in order to get "in".. and by the time newcomers have scaled the fences

⁵⁰ Dave Gibbons, *The Monkey and the Fish* (Zondervan, 2008)

built around the church, they are so socialized as churchgoers that they are not likely to be able to maintain their connection with the social groupings they came from... So we lose contact with non-believers and we lose the ability to relate to them.

No More Walls and Fences: the House of Love

Instead of building walls or fences we need to sink wells. If you sustain your connection with the water sources, you will find a whole host of people relating to Jesus from different walks of life. We allow people to come to Jesus from any direction and from any distance. The Person of Jesus stands at the center.

In Kelowna right now we have one of the larger churches talking about selling their building and decentering their life and ministry with a house church structure. They want to find ways to get outside the walls and out with their neighbors.

Another group has moved from a weekly meeting to twice a month. They are looking for ways to free up their time from meetings and programs – ways to decenter their life and ministry so they have time again to be God’s people out among the hungry and the hurting.

A couple of years ago in Vernon, just half an hour north of Kelowna, the Salvation Army sold a “church” building and used the money to fund ministry to the poor. You can bet that they were sowing seeds of trust with that action, seeds that they have reaped for the life of that town, and at the same time they were getting away from their dependence on a structure that was limiting their impact in the world.

Conclusion

In 1967 Lloyd Ogilvie made an observation similar to the one I used to open this paper. He asked some simple questions about the nature of the church and God’s purposes in redemption. What is the ultimate purpose of governance? What end does God envision for humanity? How does “governance” or leadership relate to God’s wider purposes in forming a people in the image of Christ? Ogilvie recognized that God is on a mission and that the heart of His purpose is for us to partner with Him. He asked three questions:

- *What kind of people do we want to deploy into the world?*
- *What kind of community creates that kind of people?*
What kind of leadership enables that kind of community?

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