



# **Missional Ecclesiology and Leadership:**

**Toward an Understanding of the Emerging Church**

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**2005**

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# Missional Ecclesiology and Leadership: Toward an Understanding of the Emerging Church Part I

## Prelude:

There is good news (gospel) for a troubled planet.<sup>1</sup> The good news, according to David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, is that there is "... a groundswell of interwoven movements for change... throughout the world," a loose network of ecologically-minded persons, groups, and organizations that are working toward "long-term sustainability and real social equity."<sup>2</sup> This network is effectively addressing the concerns for sustainable ecological health of our planet, not from the perspective of short-term gain but of long-term productivity.<sup>3</sup>

Suzuki and Dressel identify six characteristics that groups in this movement share. These are especially interesting and informative. With just a touch of effort, one can almost imagine that they are talking about how the church should function in the world:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) They reflect the diversity of the ecosphere, meaning that solutions are always adapted and adjusted to local conditions. Even a few miles away the conditions may have changed sufficiently to call for different methods. Those persons/organizations who have long-term interest in assuring the ecological health of their region are "locals committed to that area, who have no plans to move away" (p.4).
- 2) They are "inherently egalitarian and democratic" (p.5), addressing the interests of local, long-term residents and not short-term outside interests.
- 3) They "create a vision for where they want to go and how they want life to be, not just in the next quarter, but many years down the road" (p.5).
- 4) Humility and flexibility are basic ingredients to their work given the extreme complexities of the ecosphere that they are addressing. This means putting in place constant monitoring systems and assuming that much of what they do will be wrong and will need to be changed.
- 5) They are largely spontaneous, often unaware of what others are doing. These are grass-roots initiatives coming from the bottom up and not from the top down.
- 6) They function by consensus, recognizing that long-term impact will require long-term commitment that is not easily derailed by internal squabbles.

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<sup>1</sup> Note the title of the Suzuki/Dressel book: *Good News for a change: Hope for a troubled planet.*

<sup>2</sup> Suzuki, *Good News...*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Suzuki, *Good News...*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Suzuki, *Good News...*, p. 3-7.

I begin with this ecological “gospel” to remind us that, although in this document we will focus on the nature and role of the church in the world, many similar concerns are being addressed from perspectives and quarters very different from the immediate issues that may be on our agenda. The struggle for sustainability, survival, adaptability, contextualization, vision, humility, flexibility, spontaneity, equality, and long-term commitment and impact are also central and essential to our discussion about the church. Biblically speaking, we would not assume that such convergence of agenda between ecologists and theologians is “coincidence,” but rather it is “wisdom” at work, i.e., signs that God’s wisdom is present in all circles and the common threads can easily be discussed and shared within the larger diversity of our perspectives. Much, therefore, can be learned from “outside” sources, such as Suzuki and Dressel, given that they are not “outside” of God’s wisdom at all. We too are addressing an “ecosystem,” the potential of a “system,” but from the perspective of the long-term vision of God’s Kingdom coming to our earth. We are dealing with the same “world” that God loves so much. And we are struggling to understand how to nurture that world, and how to address its needs from the perspective of local, contextual diversity living under God’s reign. Our discussion too needs to be framed in humility, recognizing that we are engaged in nothing less than the mission of God, and God’s desire to restore and reconcile the world to its intended design. Our understandings and efforts will, by definition, be flawed and limited. But we trust they too can be “gospel” for the waiting world.

## **Introduction:**

Recent attempts to define the church as “missional” have generated much needed discussion about the role and purpose of the church in the world. I trust that this too is “good news,” not only for the church but also for the creation that God intends to “make new” via the “ministry of reconciliation” that God has conferred on the church.<sup>5</sup> This most recent effort to focus our understandings of the church has generated both enthusiasm and resistance, often in response to the use of the (new?) word “missional.” Those who applaud or resist the use of missional language usually do so because of positive or negative perceptions of and experiences with “mission” from the past. This is understandable given that what is new (for some) in the discussion is the word “missional,” and the assumed misguided application of “mission” in the past is enough to raise significant suspicion and resistance.

What is often lost, however, in both the applause and the resistance, is the contribution that this slight change in language makes toward our understanding of “church,” i.e., ecclesiology. The shift from the accustomed noun [mission] to the unaccustomed adjective [mission-al] forces the focus back onto the principal noun [church]. By using language in this way, it is no longer possible to separate the two nouns, mission and church, from each other. We are forced to think of them together, as an indivisible unity. The suspicion, by some, that missional language is just one more ploy by “mission people” to sequester the agenda of the church for mission is, thus, quite unfounded. It is, indeed, quite the contrary. The missional paradigm forces attention on the nature and

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<sup>5</sup> II Corinthians 5:17

purpose of the church. It is an opportunity to re-think ecclesiology more than a tactic to re-entrench mission. This re-focus on the church is, perhaps, the greatest contribution made by the use of “missional church” language.

The fact that of the two nouns [mission and church] it is the noun “church” that remains is significant and is not accidental. It could be different. We could, for example, talk about “ecclesial (church-ly) mission.” That would make “church” into an adjective and leave “mission” as the principal noun. While there surely are important reasons to talk about “ecclesial mission,” that is a different conversation than “missional church.” The former focuses on the nature of mission (missiology), the later on the nature of the church (ecclesiology). It is indeed the renewed focus on the church that is foundational to the missional church paradigm.

The missional church paradigm, by shifting “mission” from noun to adjective, simply suggests that the nature and essence of the church cannot be detached from its missional purpose: indeed, the essence of the church must be found in its missional vocation. We have grown accustomed to seeing ecclesiology and missiology as two distinct, and separable “nouns,” both of which may merit our attention, but which can and often need to be separated. The rise of some para-church mission organizations in the twentieth century is a visible legacy of the assumption that the mission of the church can and, at times, should be separated from the life of the church itself. I worked for an organization<sup>6</sup> for a number of years whose founder compellingly declared that the mission of God is too precious to leave in the hands of the church and needs to be disconnected from the politics of the church. Only by separating God’s mission from God’s church, he said, could God’s mission move ahead, become specialized, efficient, and effective. On the flip side of the coin, the church has often defined as its “mission” the protection and care for those that are already within its walls. Part of the legacy of one congregation I know, for example, is that the congregation was founded as a “mission” congregation some fifty years ago. Its “mission” was to attract young adult church members from rural areas as they migrated into an urban setting. “Mission,” thus, was defined as “in-reach” not out-reach. Fifty years later, this congregation continues its struggle to connect intentionally with the non-church rather than to simply define its “in-reach” as mission.

But the separation of ecclesiology from missiology goes much deeper than the two examples cited above. I have gained both a Masters and a Doctoral degree in theology and Bible from accredited and trusted seminaries, but was never once requested to take a course in missiology. Indeed, I absorbed from some of my professors a certain sense of disdain toward disciplined reflection on the strategy and activity of the church in its task of engaging the other-faith worlds with witness from and invitation to consider the contributions of the Christian faith. While we studied and argued vigorously about doctrinal details of theology, Christology, and ecclesiology and excelled in analytical tools of exegesis and hermeneutics in biblical study, we did not apply that same vigour to questions of witness beyond the confines of the church. The primary “targets” of our

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<sup>6</sup> I will leave this organization unnamed.

advanced preparation were other theologians, other denominations, and ecumenical debates within the church. We investigated at length the distinctives of one Christian tradition compared to those of other Christian traditions. We did not do the same with non-Christian traditions. In my PhD. studies, I was informed that any attempts to “apply” biblical exegetical research to the life of the contemporary church could not be tolerated within the accepted disciplines of biblical studies.<sup>7</sup>

Within Christendom,<sup>8</sup> both the Christian faith and paganism were defined by geopolitical boundaries rather than by boundaries of discipleship and idolatry. “Mission” (defined as moving beyond the political boundaries) was considered the duty of the state while the task of the church was dogmatic (forming Christendom within the boundaries). While the church accompanied and blessed the state in its conquests and crusades into pagan territories, and the state provided the needed protection for the church to engage its work of formation within the territory, essentially “mission” was taken out of the hands of the church.<sup>9</sup>

The missional task of the church indeed is to cross boundaries. But they are not essentially boundaries of geography, politics, culture or the re-location of the church from one setting to another. The boundaries of mission are the boundaries of faith and non-faith, of Christian faith and other faith, of Kingdom of God<sup>10</sup> living and living in other kingdoms, of faithfulness to God and preferences for other gods. These are the real frontiers of mission, and these frontiers need to be crossed wherever they exist, be that inside or outside the boundaries of the “empire.” The mission of the church is to engage the non-Kingdom of God realities as a living sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. The essence of the church is its invitation to participate as a community of God’s Kingdom in this mission of God. By understanding these essential nuclei, the church

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<sup>7</sup> The profound way that the church has been side-lined for the sake of mission can be seen in the difficulty we have in conceptualizing the importance of the church even when we think of the “missional church” paradigm. A good example is found in Robert Banks’ efforts to re-envision theological education from missional perspectives (cf. Banks, *Reenvisioning*.... pps. 142-144). Banks helpfully outlines and critiques the possible models for theological education: “classical model” – focusing on formation of cognitive wisdom; “vocational model” – focusing on interpretive skills leading to cognitive discernment; “dialectical model” – focusing on cognitive insight; “confessional model” – information and knowledge focusing on cognitive knowledge. In contrast to these models, Banks proposes a “missional model” – mission and partnership focusing on cognitive and practical obedience. It may not be striking that the first four models pay no attention to the church: that only proves my point. What is really striking is that Bank’s “missional” model also avoids any reference to the role of the church in “missional” theological education. To see the church as a primary instrument of God’s mission appears to be too radical to take seriously. In these models, cognitive wisdom, discernment, insight, knowledge, and obedience are all formulated without significant (or any) attention to the church. This is indeed sobering given the purpose of Bank’s analysis.

<sup>8</sup> The religious/political synthesis forged by the legalization and the eventual compulsory status of the Christian faith in the 4<sup>th</sup> century c.e. is known as Christendom.

<sup>9</sup> “The Christendom model of church may be characterized as *church without mission*” (Shenk, *Write the Vision*, p. 35).

<sup>10</sup> A comment is in order about my use of language. Every writer struggles with the appropriate use of terms indicating gender. I am using two male terms in this paper: a few pronouns referring to God and the word Kingdom instead of possible alternatives such as reign, authority, or such. Both have rich traditions of usage and meaning. I trust that the reader can excuse and forgive the use of these terms.

regains its missional character and identity. In this understanding the church can neither claim too much (i.e., that crusades, conquest, and charity will restore the world) nor should it claim too little (i.e., that the mission of the church is essentially to itself). The tasks of restoration and formation in effect become one. We begin to glimpse the critical need to unite what has been separated for too long.

### **Missional Ecclesiology:**

The confluence of the nature, purpose, activity, and organization of the church is called ecclesiology. The basic premise of missional ecclesiology is that all church priorities, programs, organizations, institutions, and structures have the same vocation, namely, to encourage the church to be what it is meant to be.<sup>11</sup>

This, of course, begs the question: what is the church meant to be? The purpose of the church is to promote, facilitate, and nurture God's efforts to restore and reconcile the world, and all that is in it, to its intended purposes.<sup>12</sup> This is a positive definition. The shadow side of the definition, and, I might add, the less politically-correct side in our pluralist society, is that God's mission, and therefore the mission of the church, is to deal redemptively with the sin of the world. Reconciliation, restoration, healing, salvation, and liberation all assume that there are non-reconciled forces, fallen situations, illnesses, contexts in need of transformation and freedoms needed from enslavement. Whether stated positively or negatively, the vocation of the church is to align with God's mission to restore, reconcile, and save the world from its commitment to paths of sin that lead to destruction and death<sup>13</sup> and to set it on God's desired path toward abundant life in his Kingdom.<sup>14</sup>

I will offer a few comments to clarify this purpose and the theological premises that undergird it.

- 1) **The revelation (disclosure) that God is actively at work at reconciling the world is very "good news."** Imagine the alternative: that God were not engaged in this process! That would be "bad" news. The term "good

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<sup>11</sup> Van Gelder in *Essence...* p. 37 describes the interrelation of the nature of the church, its ministry, and its organization in a succinct and helpful way: "The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does."

<sup>12</sup> This purpose reflects the witness of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

<sup>13</sup> It surely is not accidental that the only two references to the word "church" (*ekklesia*) in the Gospels refer to the authority of the church to deal with the sin of the world (Matthew 16:18-20; 18:16-20; cf. also John 20:21-23). Although the Mt. 16 passage does not use the word sin, and the John 20 passage does not mention the church, it seems clear that all three are talking about the same thing. The language of "binding and loosing" refers to this double-sided definition. "By binding itself to the truth of God in Christ, the church judges the world. That is, the church declares what is not of God and what will not lead to life. In binding itself to good, it judges evil for what it is. In binding itself to the spirit and character of Christ, it judges that which is contrary to the character of Christ" (Schroeder, *Church as Parable*, p. 160: see entire chapter [pps. 149-170] for an excellent discussion of the binding and loosing task of the church).

<sup>14</sup> "... that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



news” comes from the Greek *euangelion* and is commonly translated into English as “gospel.” The “gospel” of God is that God is at work restoring the world to its intended design.<sup>15</sup>

- 2) **The Bible refers to this “work” of God as the coming (arrival) of the “Kingdom” [basilea] of God.**<sup>16</sup> The “Kingdom of God” is nothing more than God’s authority (purpose) becoming real in the way the world is being shaped. Sometimes this authority becomes real in ways unknown to the actor, because God is God.<sup>17</sup> At other times it becomes real because of intentional decisions to participate with God. Both are important, and the vocation of the church is to recognize, affirm and nurture both.
- 3) **God prefers to work through incarnation.** Unfortunately, we tend to file “incarnation” under “advent” in our Christian calendars. God’s preference for incarnation pre-dates the arrival of Jesus in a manger and post-dates his death and resurrection. To incarnate [literally to embed in flesh] is the primary strategy of God. It is evident in breathing the spirit into living humans in the garden, the call of Abraham and Sarah to form a people to be a blessing, the multiple covenants between God and God’s people,<sup>18</sup> the sending of God’s son, the calling of the twelve disciples, and the formation of a new people of God’s Spirit at Pentecost. The good news is that incarnation is not only preferable, it is possible. This possibility underlies the church’s vision for its vocation and all the strategies resulting from this vision.
- 4) **The church is people.** It seems too obvious to say this, but we need to be reminded because we misuse language so badly and so routinely. We speak, for instance, of “going to church” rather than “having the church gather.” God’s primary strategy to reconcile and restore the world is to form a peoplehood that serves as a prototype of this intention, and as a vehicle for its consummation. The formation of a peoplehood, competent to discern and committed to live and act according to its discernment, is fundamental in the strategy of God and therefore in missional ecclesiology.
- 5) **The church is Christian.** This too seems so obvious, but let’s make sure we don’t overlook the obvious. There are many others who also take up the task of forming a peoplehood, to discern God’s will, and to live according to what is discerned. Some of these people-groups meet in synagogues and others in mosques. Still others meet as military armies,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. II Corinthians 5:16-20; John 3:16-21; Ephesians 1:10

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mark 1:14-15

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-7: Cyrus, King of Persia, unwittingly becomes the vehicle for God’s purposes in bringing Israel out from exile. The text indeed refers to Cyrus as God’s anointed (messiah), the only time in scripture where a pagan king is defined as such.

<sup>18</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence...* pps. 137-40, identifies six such covenantal processes in the Bible: the covenant of creation (Gen. 1-2); the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9); the Abrahamic covenants (Gen. 12, 15, 17); the Mosaic covenant (Exod. 20); the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7); and the new covenant announced (Jer. 31), introduced (Mt. 26), and its consummation promised (Acts 2).

and others in mountainous camps of revolutionaries. Some prefer isolation and live in self-defined deserts, others are formed in Buddhist monasteries. The church as Christian does not deny the activity of God outside of its own understandings, programs, and structures. But it is cognizant that it brings two unique perspectives that others do not:

- i. The church understands Jesus of Nazareth to have been the promised Messiah of God and thus is the key to understanding how God's Kingdom comes, how it looks when it arrives, and what it means to enter it and align our lives with it. The church further understands that by inviting the Lordship of Jesus of Nazareth to govern our lives, we ourselves are transformed by the same power that was present in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
  - ii. The Christian church holds its authoritative scripture to consist of both the Old and New Testaments which shed light on each other as witnesses to the gospel. These together clarify not only the coming of God's Kingdom, but also the implications of seeing Jesus as the King, the messenger, the message, and the door into the Kingdom.
- 6) **The church desires to act upon what it discerns**, i.e., to practice what it preaches, and thus be a visible sign of what it believes. The Christian church is not simply a people with a message. It is a people who are a message to the world. Its life and its message are one. This allows others to see, touch, and feel what God's authority (Kingdom) looks like when it becomes present among humans in every local social/political/cultural/economic context. Missional ecclesiology is the art of becoming the church in such a way that it becomes a living sign of the presence of God's Kingdom. All ecclesial questions of autonomy, organization, leadership, worship, and ministry are subordinated to this ecclesial purpose.

When we understand the purpose of the church in these ways, we understand why we sometimes say that the church should be "evangelizing," or "extending God's Kingdom," or "being a Kingdom community," or "preaching the good news." These are short-hand ways of connecting the vocation of the church with the vocation of God. "Evangelizing" is nothing other than aligning with God's activity in restoring and reconciling the world, because every positive response to God's efforts, big or small, is "good news" for the world. "Evangelization" makes it possible for others to respond positively to God's invitation to participate in his restoring and reconciling mission.

## **Putting Missional Ecclesiology to work:**

The church thus has two fundamental, parallel, and inseparable tasks:

- 1) **To discern** how the world would be if God's authority (Kingdom) were restored in all aspects of life and to live according to its discernment.
- 2) **To implement** strategies that are congruent with what has been discerned as the restoring and reconciling intention of God and thus also the purpose of the church. While the implementation is focused on the body-life of the church, it serves as the source of the invitation for those outside the life of the church to also align their lives with the presence of God's authority.

### **Task #1: Discernment:**

The church's task of discernment presupposes its close connection with what is being discerned. That is, when it tries to discern the mind of God, it makes every effort to have a close relationship to God. When it tries to discern the intention of God in scripture, it makes every effort to study and understand scripture well. When it tries to discern the intention of God in Jesus, it allows the Spirit of Jesus to illuminate its study of scripture, and its imagination for the Kingdom. This task of discernment assumes that the church is diligent in the following disciplines:

#### 1) **Prayer:**

In prayer we seek the voice and will of God and as such prayer is an inherently political act. Prayer is opening our spirit to God's initiative, thus allowing our spirit to be instructed and guided by the Spirit of God. In prayer we recognize the insufficiency of human endeavour and the need for transcendent guidance and trust in God's will. We seek to be reconciled to God and to each other. Prayer is foundational to ensure that the mission we engage is truly of God and not simply seeking divine blessing for our own folly.<sup>19</sup>

#### 2) **Worship:**

Worship too is made possible by God's initiative to us. This transcendent initiative comes to us as a gift. Our act of worship is our grateful recognition that we can respond to the transcendence of God by offering our praise, adoration, confession, commitment, lives, and prayers. We bring our pilgrim experiences before God, and through God's promises we are encouraged, renewed, and refreshed. We gain guidance for the continuing pilgrim journey. We are forgiven for our sins. We are united in our community. We are strengthened in our peoplehood.

#### 3) **Bathing in the full witness of scripture: its story, instruction, and wisdom:**

By allowing the biblical witness to embrace us, the story of God and God's people becomes the story of God and our people. We can begin to comprehend how God's Kingdom comes, how it functions, what it

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<sup>19</sup> For fuller reflection, cf. Suderman *Calloused...* pp. 103-107.

challenges and denounces, what it blesses, how it feels, and what it demands. This witness, interpreted in light of the life, teachings, and experience of Jesus of Nazareth, becomes our pulse, our instinct, and our intuition. We become a people whose very habits display God's reconciling presence in the world.<sup>20</sup>

**4) Gift discernment:**

The church is not orphaned in its desire to connect with how God is restoring and reconciling the world. God amply supplies spiritual gifts to the body of Christ, individually and corporately. God's strategy is quite simply: if everyone discovers and uses the giftedness that is theirs for the sake of making God's coming Kingdom flourish, then the church is fulfilling what it can do. Gift discernment and the encouragement to use these gifts fully are part of the discernment task of the church. Often we discern gifts well, but do not use them intentionally for the nurture of the Kingdom that is among us. Other times, we are committed to nurturing the Kingdom among us, but do not use the gifts with which the Spirit has endowed us. Both of these tendencies produce short-circuits that inhibit the power of the Spirit to be unleashed as it should.

**5) Disciple-making:**

The word "disciple" in the New Testament Greek, in its most basic sense, means to be a "student," someone who is learning and getting trained for a task and vocation. The church encourages and admonishes, blesses and denounces, exhorts and comforts, teaches and learns in its communal process of discipleship. Sometimes these activities are directed at the internal body-life of the church itself; other times they are directed at the watching world external to the life of the church. The task of making disciples and "teaching them everything that I have commanded you"<sup>21</sup> is an ongoing task of renewal and conversion. The church cannot instruct a new believer into faith without, at the same time, entering into significant re-evaluation of its own life. By "making disciples" the church strengthens its own life of corporate discipleship.

**6) Apostle-making:**

The word "apostle" in the New Testament Greek, in its most basic sense, means to be "a sent one;" sent with the authority of the Spirit in the church, the gifts that have been discerned, the training that has been received in order to apply the gifts and the learning to the practical life of each cultural/political context. Discipleship is not the private property of the congregation; it is always intended for the public engagement of apostleship. "Sentness," as an essential characteristic, is as true of each individual member of the body as it is true of the body itself. The church is

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<sup>20</sup> "A virtue is a habit that makes a person good... [it] is not a mere intention. You cannot possess the virtue of love without habitually acting lovingly" (Huebner, *Church as Parable*, p.179). Actually, this entire chapter (pps. 171-195) is very helpful in understanding the church as a community of habit.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

“sent,” it is not the “sender.” God and the Holy Spirit are the senders. The mission is theirs. The church is sent on a mission initiated by God. This intimate relationship between discipleship and apostleship has frequently been short-circuited in our ecclesiology.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes discipleship does not lead to apostleship. When this happens the salt is piled up inside the walls of the Christian community and has no real impact on the transforming agenda that God engages. Sometimes apostleship is not nurtured by holistic discipleship. When this happens, the salt loses its flavour, and although it is out there flailing away in the world, it is ineffective because it does not address the context with the wisdom of the gospel. Both of these are short-circuits that abort the vocation of the church.<sup>23</sup>

### **Fruits of discernment:**

The church of Jesus Christ has engaged the above mentioned discernment disciplines for nearly 2,000 years. It is only fair to ask: What have we discerned? How has our wisdom changed? What would the world be like if God’s authority (Kingdom) were restored in all aspects of life? Or what is the “new creation” like that God promises through Christ?<sup>24</sup>

I offer the following as fruits of the church’s task of discernment, knowing full well that our discernment is not yet (and never will be) complete.<sup>25</sup> It is worth repeating

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<sup>22</sup> For a good summary of the importance of “apostolic leadership,” cf. Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping...* , pp. 165-181.

<sup>23</sup> I am aware that there are significant movements in our society that either deny the possibility of apostleship in post-biblical times, or limit apostleship to some strong, charismatic leaders who claim some direct connection with the original apostles or some special apostolic commissioning from the Holy Spirit. Neither of these emphases can be supported from the biblical record. It is true that the word “apostle” in some uses of the New Testament has a specialized meaning where it refers only to the original twelve apostles of Jesus. It is also true, however, that the concept of the “sent ones” is useful enough for the New Testament writers that it becomes a characteristic of the body of disciples called, transformed and sent by Jesus into the world. Paul, for example, insists that his “apostleship” is legitimate and as valid as the original twelve (Gal. 1:1; 2:8; Acts 26:17). Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto the gathered community and “sends” them out as the Father has “sent” him (John 20:21). Not only, in the later passage, is the concept of apostleship applied beyond the circle of the twelve to Jesus himself, Jesus in turn applies it to a circle of the gathered that is much bigger than the twelve (cf. Luke 24:33; Acts 1:12-14). In Ephesians 4, the five dimensions of Christian leadership in the churches include reference to the “apostle” as one of the leadership gifts that the Spirit bestows on the community gathered for the sake of its missional vocation. This does not refer only to the gift that the original twelve continue to be to the church (important as that may be), but refers to the essential leadership needed for the church to fulfill its apostolic mission to the world. It is critically important, therefore, not to allow the contemporary one-sided use of the word “apostolic” to sequester its rich implications for church life and for the vocation of the church. As with the word “evangelism” we cannot afford to allow those who prefer to limit and reduce its implications to be the ones who define the words for us. When we allow that, we abandon the use of a very rich concept and thereby lose not only the bathwater but the baby as well.

<sup>24</sup> II Corinthians 5:17

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that the fruit of centuries of discernment listed here is not a “denominational” list of conclusions. There has been a remarkable convergence of consensus in discernment in ecumenical circles even though there continues to be significant divergence in our debates about the practicality of

that if this is what the church has discerned to be God's desire for the world, the body-life of the church should reflect this discernment, i.e., we need to be able to say for each of the points listed, "Come and you will see" how this life is both feasible and preferable.

The world, as God's new creation, would:

- a) Demonstrate more grace and less condemnation. The patient and recurring initiatives of God to restore the world via a people of blessing indicates the extent of grace that God showers on his creation.
- b) Demonstrate strategies for life and oppose those leading to death. God in resurrecting Jesus from the dead pronounced a resounding "yes" to what the political and religious authorities had judged to be "no." The life-generating discernment and subsequent choices of Jesus were vindicated, and were victorious over the death-dealing preferences of his opponents.
- c) Demonstrate a preferential option for the plight of the poor, the weak, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised to make sure that their access to life-generating potential is greater than their enslavement to death-dealing realities.
- d) Demonstrate a passion for peace and everything that makes for peace and abhorrence for our multiple methods of expressing inhumanity towards each other.
- e) Demonstrate its preference for truth, honesty, and transparency rather than corruption, lies, and manipulation.
- f) Demonstrate a preference for compassion, empathy, and identification with the struggles of others, rather than imposition, colonialization, and disregard for the plight of others.
- g) Demonstrate a preference for the common good, for peoplehood, for community, for our shared destiny, rather than encourage rampant individualism, competition, and isolation.
- h) Struggle for justice so that unjust actions and systems would become disenfranchised.
- i) Demonstrate hospitality to the stranger and generosity of spirit to all who cross our paths, rather than greed, defensiveness, and self-protection.
- j) Recognize and demonstrate the critical importance of incarnating Kingdom values, rather than generating distance between races and peoples. Incarnation demonstrates that it is possible that every context in the world can understand and respond to the presence of God in its midst.
- k) Demonstrate a preference for holiness: bringing the sanctity of ethical living closer, rather than promoting impurity and fraud.

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what has been discerned for our age, and the strategies that best respond to what has been discerned. This divergence need not overshadow the areas of convergence that have become apparent.

- l) Learn to love rather than to hate its enemies and all those who demonstrate ill-will against it.
- m) Seek to become a blessing to all nations rather than a curse to some.
- n) Prefer to forgive rather than to seek revenge for wrong-doing.
- o) Share and be generous rather than stingily stockpiling benefits for some that are inaccessible to others.
- p) Take better care of the “garden” that God has given to us. We would ensure that natural resources are renewed, that selfish greed does not generate more pollution, that the quality of the environment is protected and honoured, that life is ecologically sustainable.
- q) Struggle for the equality of all rather than unequal advantage of a few.
- r) Simplify but deepen its desires, from complex, consumerist, self-gratification to love of God and neighbour and to do unto others what we would have others do to us.
- s) Discover integral ways of celebrating and expressing the joy of being under God, rather than the grief that is inevitably associated with denying God and generating our own pseudo-replacements of God.
- t) Understand the need for the liberation of all people rather than enslavement of some for the benefit of others.
- u) Work for salvation of all rather than the destruction of some so that others can live.
- v) Work at reconciliation that would do away with the artificial barriers that divide us.
- w) Learn to seek life at life-generating sources rather than seeking abundant life at pseudo sources of life. This confusion is the greatest sin of our world and this confusion would be overcome.<sup>26</sup>

### **Task #2: Implementation:**

We have indicated above the church’s double task of discernment and implementation of what is discerned. Having looked with some detail at the elements needed for discernment and the fruits of our efforts, we now need to look more closely at the tools and strategies needed to live out what we have discerned to be the intention of God. What are the strategies needed that are congruent with what has been discerned as the restoring and reconciling intention of God and thus also the purpose of the church?

By posing the question this way, we begin to see the priorities that we face as a church and the ecclesiology that our commitment to connecting with God’s mission suggests for us.

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, a German theologian, defines sin as confusing the fountain of life in our search for life. This definition clarifies much of what we experience in our world and is a helpful way of understanding the hidden attraction that sin exercises over all of us. After all, is there anything wrong with searching for life?

- 1) The highest priority for our ministries will be to work toward **forming a people of God**. The formation of peoplehood is critical for two reasons:
  - a) We need a community of God to watch the world, to discern what God is doing, and to connect with that; and
  - b) We need a community of God for the world to watch, so that reconciling alternatives of the gospel can be watched, be better understood and thereby become relevant and practical to the life of the world.

God's community is the primary sacrament in God's strategy. A sacrament, simply put, is human action through which God's grace becomes evident and is imparted to the world.<sup>27</sup> Our priority task will be to make sure that every context in the world is blessed with the presence of a discerning community, dedicated to representing the presence of God's Kingdom in that context, as understood through Jesus of Nazareth. This community will be local, deeply-rooted and permanent in each context. It will be capable of contextualizing the gospel there and of recognizing and encouraging the indigenization of the gospel (i.e., to recognize biblical wisdom) already present in that setting.<sup>28</sup> It will be a discerning and mature community, freed from myth and fear, to live out and proclaim the implications of the presence of God's Kingdom in that setting. Thus the community of God becomes a sacrament of God's grace: a vehicle by which the world can understand God's grace and respond to it.

- 2) We will work towards **keeping alive the memory** of how God has been at work in reconciling the world in the past. This is a memory that liberates us to align with what is already known. This memory allows us to understand, for example, that the Exodus of Israel from Egypt was not simply a one-time act of God to free God's people from slavery, but represents the eternal will of God, that people should be free to obey and worship God. This memory allows us to understand that the resurrection of Jesus was not simply another re-enactment of the first Exodus, again demonstrating God's preference for life over death, but is the foundation for our hope for the future knowing that this preference for life is a characteristic of God and we can confidently plan our communal life according to it. The world can watch as both baptism and the Lord's Supper are enacted by the church, not as dead rituals, but as memory that commissions our sentness into the world (baptism) and that celebrates our confidence in the future even when sacrifice is necessary (the Supper). Thus the community of God becomes the

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<sup>27</sup> Yoder: *Body Politics*, "...human action in which God acts" p.71.

<sup>28</sup> I understand "contextualization" to be the process that brings the "alien material" of the gospel of God into a context that is not yet taking seriously that part of the gospel, and applies it there in order to address the issues of that context. I understand "indigenization" to be the previous activity of God in a given context that makes the coming of the Christian gospel feel like a "homecoming," because the context is already hospitable to receiving this gospel. The wisdom tradition in the Bible underscores these common threads of God's activity everywhere. Defined in this way, these terms alert us to the fact that in every context some parts of the gospel of Christ are both alien (and therefore often fiercely resisted) and resident (and thereby warmly embraced). It is the task of the discerning community of God to identify the elements of the gospel that are indigenous to the context in order to affirm them, as well as to bring in those elements of the gospel that are not evident and apply them.



vehicle of liberating memory, embedded in a world too often hostile both to memory and to liberation

- 3) We will work towards **cultivating the imagination of God's Kingdom people**, so that the future becomes a fountain of inspiration and not a source of dread. For a community committed to the Christian gospel, the threats that confront us are seen in light of the promised future in God. By living according to the promise and the hope of the future now, the world already begins to resemble this future in God. The awakening of the "Godly imagination" of the church is one of our greatest challenges and most important tasks. It is a challenge because our culture fosters fear and our imaginations are colonized by multiple fears that make the coming and presence of God's Kingdom unwelcome. The Kingdom among us is converted into bad news by imaginations enslaved to keeping the world as it is or as it once was. Our imaginations are colonized by commitments to personal and institutional survival, by fears that our pseudo steering-wheel of history will be taken out of our hands, by fears that the ultimate weapons of the world, namely, threat, torture, and death may indeed be mightier than the ultimate weapon of God, namely the power and the commitment to generate life out of death. Our imaginations are colonized by fears of economic insecurity, by peer persuasion, by the search for instant gratification, by commitments to efficiency over relationships, by our incessant search for pleasure and our attempts to avoid pain, by defining the good life according to the idols of fashion, entertainment and sports, by media committed to gloss and marketing, by visions of ease and happiness easily accessible if only we give free reign to our consumerist instincts, by our preferences for tribalism, in short, by our frenetic search for life at the very fountains that ultimately are not life-giving.

In light of this saturation of our imaginations by non life-generating forces, it is the task of the community of Christ to imagine a world that responds to the presence of God's Kingdom, and to organize itself according to what can be seen only through these eyes of faith and hope.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, hope is injected into the world and the Christian community begins to fulfill the vocation to which it has been called. In order to bring a gospel of hope to the world, we must be hopeful people. Our imaginations must be nurtured by the vision of what has already come in Jesus and what will be consummated by God.

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<sup>29</sup> I have been relating to multiple expressions of the church in Cuba for the last 17 years. One of the "assignments" I've frequently given to pastors, church leaders, and theologians is an analysis of the heroes that are lifted up as worthy role models for the population. It is almost impossible for them to think of a Cuban hero who is not male, revolutionary, violent, and dead. I ask them whether these are adequate heroes for the Christian community in Cuba. The response, more often than not, is stunned silence (at first) and then a dawning realization how the popular culture of that setting has colonized the imagination of the church. We then talk about heroes of the church and how these could be lifted up as an alternative paradigm to nurture the imagination of their children, youth, and adults. This is a very stimulating (and dangerous) exercise for them and they engage it with enormous energy and gratitude. But I am also always reminded how important this same exercise is for Canadians and USians. Too often our imaginations are colonized by heroes of fashion, sports, beauty, business, screen, and music. We too need to re-conceptualize the heroes worthy of nourishing our Kingdom imaginations.

- 4) In order to more adequately reflect the “lordship” of Jesus of Nazareth in our church, we need to discover vital ways of **implementing the prophetic, priestly, sagely, and kingly functions of our Lord.**<sup>30</sup>
- a) **The church as prophet:** Based on the fruits of our discernment, the church will become a permanent presence of critique and exhortation in the world. While the church will “forbear” and “endure” (Latin equivalents of “tolerate”) death-dealing activities that our culture may bless as normal, it will not agree that they are acceptable and good and it will react against such destructive assumptions that influence our societies. In this way the church will participate in the prophetic functions of our Lord.<sup>31</sup> The prophetic function of the church assumes that: i) the world is

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<sup>30</sup> I am using here the functional characteristics ascribed to Jesus in much classical Christological discussion. John Calvin is widely credited with being the first theologian to use the threefold office of Christ (in Latin, the *munus triplex*) as a category of systematic theology. The pertinent passage in the 1559 (i.e. the final) edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* is the following:

... the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king and priest. (*Book II, Chapter XV*).

Subsequently, the threefold office found its way into the confessional and later catechetical life of the Reformed Churches, e.g. Lutheran: *The Heidelberg Catechism*, (1562); Presbyterian: *The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly* (1649). From this usage, the *munus triplex* has been used by many theologians. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics...* pps. 187-201, helpfully insists on including the “sagely” function of Jesus as well, given that there is a strong scholarly consensus that Jesus was a teacher of wisdom, thoroughly rooted in the wisdom traditions of the Old Testament. Janzen identifies these four as “paradigmatic roles,” meaning that these functions have paradigmatic relevance for the followers of Jesus, especially in terms of ethics. I am expanding the paradigmatic intent of these functions to define the purpose and essence of the life and ministry of the church as it aligns with the life of its Lord. In other words, I am suggesting that these classical functions can serve not only in theological/Christological and ethical discussions, but also as missiological foundations for the church.

<sup>31</sup> A. James Reimer says: “One might draw the conclusion from this confession that we ought to promote unlimited tolerance in society and in the church. Wrong. Tolerance is an unbiblical and un-Christian concept (cf. *Canadian Mennonite*, Nov. 4, 2002, vol. 6, no. 24).

In normal Canadian usage, the word “tolerate” has shifted its meaning from its Latin root (to forbear or endure). “To tolerate” has become synonymous with “acceptance,” “it’s ok,” or even “agreement,” and as such is espoused as a societal virtue. “Intolerance,” on the other hand, has also shifted from its Latin root meaning “not capable of or willing to endure or forbear” to mean “bigoted,” “narrow-sighted,” “prejudiced,” and “fanatical.” As such “intolerance” is assumed to be a societal vice. These subtle, but very substantial, shifts in meaning can lead to misunderstandings. While the church should “tolerate” (in the Latin sense) sin, and witness against “intolerance” (in the Latin sense), it should not “tolerate” everything in the Canadian sense. While the church “endures” the presence of sin and “forbears” the presence of sinners, it does not agree, bless, or accept sin as a preferred way of operating within society. At the same time, the church does not become obnoxious, bigoted, or prejudiced, but struggles against what has become normal. From the perspective of a Kingdom of God community, there are many things that should not be blessed, agreed to, or accepted as normal. It should be unthinkable, for example, that intentional torture continues to be a normal and routine strategy of political nations around the world, including the USA. The appeal to torture must go the way of slavery: it must be seen as an affront to humanity and we must work for its extinction. It is not acceptable to the church as a Kingdom of God society that Canadian men manipulate, abuse, brutalize, and take advantage of disenfranchised children in many parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world for the sake of their own sexual gratification. The presence of such brutalization is well documented. It is not ok to a Kingdom of God community that the Christian gospel be used to justify violence, killing, and disregard for human suffering, often by spokespersons pretending to speak on behalf of these Kingdom communities. In other words, “tolerance” (in normal Canadian usage) is not a Christian virtue. The

not yet the way it is meant to be; ii) transformation is possible through the power of God; iii) the church is called to be an agent of change and transformation in the world. Given these assumptions, the church will uncover the deceit underlying many of the presumptions of our society, it will expose inhumanity whenever and wherever it occurs, and it will suggest alternative approaches to issues and life-generating possibilities that are time-tested within the life of the community itself.<sup>32</sup> And the church will need to be prepared to suffer the reactions of the powers that are thus exposed. Because the entry of the Kingdom of God into any context is always, to some degree, the entrance of a stranger into inhospitable surroundings, the prophetic vocation of the church will never be easy and will not end. It is indeed part of what it means to yield to and align with the lordship of Jesus in our lives.

- b) **The church as priest:** At the same time, the church will foster the priestly presence of its Lord in our world. The church will mediate the presence of God to those seeking his face. The church will be a source of the grace and healing that God seeks to bring to the world. It will bind up the wounded, encourage the down-hearted, and demonstrate compassion to the suffering. The church will be present wherever pain is generated, it will comfort the afflicted, it will lighten the yoke of the oppressed. The church will bless, edify, and encourage. It will be a source of relief and love to all who seek liberation. The church will intercede for the world and all who are in it. The church will not attempt to balance its prophetic and priestly functions, because balancing too often means limiting one in order to do the other. Rather, the church will be lavish with its dedication to the prophetic and priestly functions, without setting predetermined limitations on their balance.
- c) **The church as sage:** The church will also impart the wisdom of the Kingdom of God thus exercising its sagely function as did our Lord. The church will recognize that God's wisdom in the world is not limited to the boundaries of the church. Rather it will be capable of discerning the wisdom of God regardless of its source, and will be willing to align with it, encourage and promote it, and defend it for the sake of God's Kingdom. The church will discover ways to make the Word of the Lord present and relevant in all contexts and to all issues. The wisdom of God will overflow from the life of the church and thus will be congruent with its practice. In imparting its Kingdom alternatives to the world, the church will be able to say "come and see," thus inviting others into the reality of the wisdom it preaches. The wisdom of the Lord will serve as the foundation both in the prophetic and priestly ministry of the church. It will be abundantly

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prophetic ministry of the Christian church leads the church to some form of resistant forbearance, identifying virtues as those things that reflect faithfulness to its Lord and his Kingdom.

<sup>32</sup> A. James Reimer states: "There is a fundamental difference between the Christian notion of forbearance and the pagan notion of tolerance. With forbearance, one holds strong commitments and tries to convince others to share them, while learning to live with those who differ from us (cf. *Canadian Mennonite*, Nov. 4, 2002, vol.6, no. 24).

present, it will be relevant, and it will be practical to the life of the society in which the church exists.

- d) **The church as King:** The church's Lord has also been designated King. It is important for the church to discern how the kingly functions of our Lord can become a part of its own vocation of faithfulness. The church's understanding of kingship will need to be aligned with what it knows about the kingship of Christ. It will suspect the weakness of earthly power and trust the divine power of earthly weakness. It will affirm the strength of servant-hood and exercise it as a kingly function. It will nourish the spirituality of exile with the confidence that the temple of God is in the community of Christ, the palace of power is in the cross of Christ, the territory of the Kingdom is the permeating presence and activity of God, and the army of God is wherever peace is nurtured, justice is done, faithfulness and trust are fostered, truth is lived, and salvation is accepted. Power is where prayer, patience, and perseverance are exercised in the wisdom of the Lord.<sup>33</sup> This kingly presence of the church is exercised unreservedly in concert with the wisdom it possesses and its willingness to fulfill its prophetic and priestly functions.

- 5) **How do ordinary pew people move from being disciples to becoming empowered apostles,** energized by memory, inspired by imagination, and courageous and wise enough to engage the world in prophetic, priestly, sagely, and kingly ways? To answer this question we will focus on the witness of the New Testament as it reflects the life of the early churches. There we see an emerging commitment to a pattern of community life and ministry that takes seriously four foci: proclamation, service, communion, and teaching. We will look at each of these to better understand the basic questions of empowerment of all in the church and thus of missional ecclesiology.

- a) **Proclamation [*kerygma*]:** The Bible is the book of the church and the church is the people of the Bible. Proclamation [*kerygma*] is the dramatic engagement of our contemporary peoplehood with the peoplehood that has gone before us. We have indicated above that God's mission is to restore and reconcile the world to its intended design. The Bible depicts the efforts of God's people, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim their experience with God in this endeavour through many centuries. Its witness includes stories, testimonies, wisdom gained, mistakes made, misconceptions, disobedience, exhortation, advice, and confession. Sometimes each part appears to point to an overarching plan for the world (what contemporary discussion would call a meta-narrative). At other times, it isn't clear at all how particular experiences and nuggets of wisdom tie into the intention of what God is/was doing. The Bible is a witness to human response to God's initiatives and to God's response to human frailty and strength. The Bible is the second word of God to the world: the first one always being God's initiatives and perseverance in transforming the persons and the world God created. The proclamation

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ephesians 6:10-20

ministries of the church need to be as varied as the sources they proclaim. The critical screen is to make sure that the biblical witness to God and to God's people intersect with our own story and that our story intersects with this witness. In these intersections there is much mystery, and strange, unpredictable things begin to happen. Ordinary people begin to see themselves in the stories and the wisdom they engage. Everyday people begin to see how their humble and routine activities can fit into a larger pattern of God working in the world for the sake of its redemption. In proclamation "the faith that grounds the church is recounted, spoken, and re-enacted in such a way that faith comes alive within the congregation... *Kerygma* is both a source of transforming power to those in the congregation and an impelling force in their encounters with the outside world."<sup>34</sup>

- b) **Service [*diakonia*]:** Part of the proclamation that inspires and informs the church is the biblical witness about God's people engaging the world in acts of service, compassion, and hospitality. We are captivated by the way the prophet Isaiah and the Psalmist struggle with the meaning of a people living in exile, disenfranchised from their homeland, without a king, army, palace, and temple, and requested to sing its songs in foreign lands.<sup>35</sup> We are surprised by Isaiah's conclusion, namely that Israel [the house of Jacob] is to bring healing and salvation to the world by bearing the sins of the world.<sup>36</sup> He understands that the people of God is a suffering servant, willing to sacrifice its life for the well-being of others, unwilling to snuff out a smouldering wick, or break off a bent branch.<sup>37</sup> The people of God will transform and heal through non-violent strategies of bringing justice to the nations, suffering the consequences of those who will resist. This is the vision that Jesus of Nazareth proposes as the compelling purpose and strategy of the people of God. 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,.."<sup>38</sup> Jesus brings what appears to be a marginal voice from the Old Testament and puts this voice on centre stage, thus suggesting the way in which we should understand the dynamics of and leadership for God's

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<sup>34</sup> Mead: *Transforming Congregations*, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 40-55; see also Psalm 137.

<sup>36</sup> The suffering servant in Isaiah is first and foremost a reference to the character and strategies of God's peoplehood. The servant is defined as such in Is. 41:8, 9; 42:1, 18, 19, 24; 43:1, 10; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:1, 12; 49:3; 50:5, 10; 51:4, 16; 52:13. The idea that the people would suffer like this for the sins of the world was, and still is, not new to Judaism. The radical idea introduced by Jesus is that the people's Messiah will also be like this, i.e., the suffering peoplehood is a precursor to a suffering Messiah. That was unthinkable given the dominant sense in Judaism that the people were suffering because the Messiah had not yet come. And that the Messiah's coming would transform this state of suffering. Jesus' proposal that the Messiah will indeed align with the suffering peoplehood of Isaiah is a radical departure of their understanding both of the fate of the people and the strategy of the Messiah.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 42: 1-4

<sup>38</sup> Mark 10:42-3

Kingdom. Other stories verify this preference. Jesus demonstrates that the basin and the towel are primary tools of the Kingdom, and that the compassion of the good Samaritan is better than the piety and barriers of purity suggested by the religious establishment. The stance of a servant is not optional for the people of God. It is, rather, a characteristic of how God has decided to reconcile and restore the world. The church will find multiple, creative ways to live out the servant leadership and peoplehood proposed by Jesus.

- c) **Communion [*koinonia*]:** Communion refers to the internal life of the body of Christ, the community of God. It points to the way in which this group of people relates to one another, discerns and decides things together, exercises authority, power, and leadership in the body, shares and carries each other's loads of life, disciplines and forgives each other, worships, prays, and remembers together, commits resources and gifts to God's work, administers the life of the community, and encourages each other. The communion in the body of Christ assumes that the Holy Spirit has already provided the necessary platform for unity; it is the task of the church to maintain this unity.<sup>39</sup> Communion in the body also assumes that the diversity that characterizes the gifts given to the community is indeed a gift: diversity that needs to be nurtured, trained, and channelled.<sup>40</sup> All gifts and the persons to whom they have been given are important parts of the body: none more important than the others.

Parker Palmer, writer for the Alban Institute, identifies ten things that life in community offers to the participants and through them to the broader world.<sup>41</sup> These experiences, when linked to what Jesus taught about the presence of the Kingdom of God, articulate some of the practical things that happen within the communion of the church that at the same time are critical political lessons for the societies in which the church is placed. In the communion of the church:

- 1) Strangers meet on common ground: this is an imperative for dialogue and hospitality;
- 2) Fear of the stranger is faced and dealt with: the church is a safe place where stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination are out of place;
- 3) Scarce resources are shared and abundance is generated: generosity assumes abundance and challenges the scarcity mentality of competitive systems. When resources are shared, they are multiplied, not diminished.
- 4) Conflict occurs and is resolved: reconciliation is possible and becomes a testimony that hostilities can not only cease, new beginnings are possible.
- 5) Life is given color, texture, drama, a festive air: the diversity of gifts in the church becomes creativity in action in the broader community.

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<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 4:3

<sup>40</sup> cf. I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4: 7-16; I Peter 4:10-11

<sup>41</sup> Parker Palmer, *Going Public*, Alban Institute, 1980. The commentary for each lesson is mine.

- 6) People are drawn out of themselves: by reaching out to others, others are empowered to reach in to the communion of the body. Normal people become apostles, and lonely people isolated each by his/her own barriers become disciples.
- 7) Mutual responsibility becomes evident and mutual aid possible: we learn that it is possible to help each other; that life is not an island after all.
- 8) Opinions become audible and accountable: opinions need to be heard, and they need to be subjected to communal accountability. Opinion without accountability is gossip. Accountability without the freedom for opinion is censorship. The church is a laboratory for dialogue subordinated to accountability.
- 9) Vision is projected and projects are attempted: the vision of the church, namely that the Kingdom of God is becoming present, is so big that it does not fade. This vision is big enough to foster activity. This vision is not optimistic or progressive (assuming we can bring it about if only we work harder) but it is hopeful (we are connected to one who can).
- 10) People are empowered and protected against power: the church understands both the life-giving potential and the destructive possibility of power. In community, power can be used for life-giving purposes.

So while the communion of the body focuses the internal life of the body, it becomes one of its main instruments for witness to those beyond it. What more compelling and debate-stopping clincher can there be than to invite a doubter, an opponent, a seeker, or even an enemy to “come and see” how what we speak about is flesh and blood in the community in which we are members. If the seeker is interested in justice, experiencing the communion of the body will demonstrate how justice is lived out among diversity. If the doubter doubts that non-violence is possible, experiencing the communion of the body will show how it is possible to foster a non-violent spirit. If the enemy is seeking revenge, experiencing the communion of the body will reveal that forgiveness is a viable and reasonable alternative. Communion thus is not simply the inner life of the congregation. It is the fundamental platform that gives integrity to our witness.

- d) **Teaching [*didache*]:** In teaching we take seriously both Jesus’ admonition that we should be able to “discern the times” as well as we can predict the weather,<sup>42</sup> and the Elder John’s admonition to “test the spirits, because not all spirits are from God.”<sup>43</sup> As is the ministry of proclamation, the teaching ministry of the church too is devoted to the witness to God’s presence among God’s people. Teaching, however, is more than proclamation. It involves critical reflection, careful analysis, comparing, contrasting, summarizing, systematizing, and applying all the diversity we find in the biblical witness. The teaching ministry leads us to investigate

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<sup>42</sup> Luke 12: 54-59

<sup>43</sup> I John 3:18-27; 4:1-6

our own context and experience in the same careful way that we investigate the witnesses of old. In teaching we try to name what is happening. We look at tendencies, trends, and shifts in order to understand better how the biblical witness can be instructive to our own story. Teaching places us firmly on the boundary of the internal wisdom of the church and the external challenges and opportunities present in our culture. In teaching we extrapolate the implications of God's activity in the past and apply them to our experiences in the present. Teaching is a dialogue between Holy Scripture and the many "scriptures" of our time, some of which are very unholy. Teaching is an opportunity to interact with the community and its assumptions. Teaching allows us to hold up presuppositions to the light to determine what spirit is nourishing them. Teaching is where the liberating memory of the past informs our lifestyle today, aligning it with what we understand to be the mind of God. Teaching is where history, contemporary experience, and hope for the future are melded together with the forces of our culture through careful communal discernment and dialogue. Teaching is a critical tool for the processes of disciple and apostle-making. Every Christian congregation must be a teaching centre and every Christian must be a student.

### **Structure and Organization for Missional Ecclesiology:**

We have looked at basic premises underlying the vision, purpose, and vocation of the church. We have also looked at the functions of discernment and implementation that rise out of its vocation. We must now look at the form: how can we best structure and organize so that the vocation of the church can move forward? If it is true that "form follows function," I would further suggest that function follows vocation which in turn follows vision. How do we assure that structures themselves already mirror the vocation they are called to give form to?

In reviewing the tasks of discernment and implementation outlined above, a few general comments need to be made that should inform the local, regional, national, and global structures of the church.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The reader will note that I refer to the multiple organizational possibilities of the church (in all its levels) variously as a "system," a "corporate structure," an "institution," etc. While these are terms most often heard in reference to business systems, I am not equating or advocating that the church copy corporate business structures for its mission. The church continues to be best defined more organically, perhaps, as a "body," or a "vine," or a "community." I do think, however, that the contemporary language can help to remind us that we are indeed talking about a "system," "corporate" (literally "bodily") functions, and an "institution," whose form and organization, while defined by diversity, needs careful attention.



- 1) **Our vocation as a church is big.**<sup>45</sup> My Colombian colleagues used to say: This is so urgent we need to go slowly. So it is with the vocation of the church. It is so big that we must pay attention to every small piece that can nourish its becoming reality. Structures and organization will need to pay attention to the immensity of the vocation and to the tiniest contribution that can encourage it to happen. The individual and the personal needs and transformations need attention as do the systemic and communal possibilities. This need to pay attention to the bigness of the vocation is a structural challenge.
- 2) **Leadership is needed and leadership there will be.** The question is whether the leadership will in fact move the church intentionally towards its missional vocation or not. Much leadership does not do so. Sometimes leadership leads to the past, other times it leads to maintenance. For the church to respond to its calling as outlined above, leadership will need to be called, trained, and commissioned to help move the church toward its calling.
- 3) **Specializations will be needed within the system.** Not every one needs to do the same thing. But it is important that the church responds in a big and holistic way. Careful discernment of roles will need to happen so that what is needed is possible.
- 4) **We will need to cooperate and not compete.** Each specialty and ministry will need to do everything possible to cooperate and not to duplicate, to nourish and not to compete with the ministry of others.
- 5) **We need to do some things together** and that means that some tasks are mandated to some to do on behalf of the whole. There are other tasks that should be done together even if it is possible to do them alone. There are still other tasks that need to be done in all parts of the system.
- 6) **Good things need to be institutionalized.** By that, I do not mean that bureaucracies should flourish. I mean that if something is important to do for the Kingdom of God, it is good to set up structures that facilitate and enable these good things to happen again and again and again.
- 7) **Every part of the system needs to be as healthy as possible.** We need healthy congregations that have a clear sense of their missional vocations. We need healthy educational systems that are committed to help the church to be what it is meant to be. We need healthy corporate (body) structures that can represent the needs of the church in many places. We need healthy members whose imagination has been ignited by the potential of the Kingdom of God coming among us.
- 8) **The ecclesial system needs to pay close attention to the individual persons.** We need to find particular ways of discerning the spiritual gifts of everyone and encouraging the use of these gifts. There need to be ways of engaging and responding to the individual needs of persons without the church simply becoming a “needs” provider. Transformations come when people change. And

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<sup>45</sup> The Letter to the Ephesians articulates this big vocation as follows: “... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). Now that’s big!

the church is there to witness to the possibility that God can change the lives of people.

- 9) **The ecclesial system needs to pay close attention to the needs of the system.** Systems and organizations tend to develop a life of their own. Leaders must be vigilant to make sure the system is functioning as it should and is not doing more or less than it should. We need healthy systems as much as we need transformed individuals.
- 10) **The congregation**, contextualized in its setting, permanently committed to discerning how to respond to God's coming Kingdom in that context, deeply rooted, alien and at home, **continues to be the foundational and indispensable unit** for the church to move towards its vocation.

### **What do congregations need that other levels of the organization can help with?**

The answers to this question will help to discern missional structure and leadership in the system beyond the life of the congregation itself. Let me suggest a few things that congregations, all congregations, need:

- 1) Congregations need identity that transcends the congregation itself. All congregations seek broader identity. It is sometimes encouraging, sometimes exasperating where they search for and/or find this identity.
- 2) Congregations need a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. Belonging is similar to the search for identity, but it is not the same. Belonging provides a sense of being cared for in spite of the shortcomings, failures, and struggles of a congregation.
- 3) Congregations need to keep refreshing their vision for what the church is meant to be and what the vocation of the church is now. Without clear vision and purpose, congregations flounder. Broad discernment is needed.
- 4) Congregations need to keep on articulating who they are, who they want to be, what they believe, and how they understand their vocation. This is a task that is much better when done broadly rather than alone.
- 5) Congregations need discernment in how to work with tough issues that arise in the life of the congregation and in its engagement with the world. It is good that such discernment be broader rather than narrower.
- 6) Congregations need to be encouraged and they need to be exhorted. Momentum does not carry a body forever. There must be ways of spurring congregations on to new heights and to lift them out of ruts and doldrums.
- 7) Congregations need leaders who have a clear, compelling, and compassionate sense of vocation for the church. This assumes that leadership is trained and that training is available. While leaders can (and should) be called from within the congregation, the training of leadership will need to be shared.

- 8) Congregations need educational and other resources. It is best that these resources are broadly discerned and provided.
- 9) Congregations need leaders who themselves are pastored. Leadership can be lonely, and leaders need pastors. Even pastors need pastors. This ministry must often come from the broader church structure.
- 10) Congregations need to keep their communal memories alive and refreshed. Memory liberates and guides for future faithfulness. The New Testament word for “truth” (*alethea*) literally means “not to forget,” i.e., to remember. Dynamic hope is built on truth (remembering). The Old Testament (Hebrew) word for truth is ‘*emet*’ and means “to be trustworthy or reliable.” This too points to the reliability of scripture’s witness to the gospel.
- 11) Congregations need avenues to do things together with others and/or to mandate others to do things on their behalf. Most congregations can and want to do more than what they can do themselves by participating in joint opportunities.
- 12) Congregations need help when they get into trouble, and most do sooner or later. Most often, congregations need help when conflicts arise and when personnel issues become complex. To whom will they turn when they need help?
- 13) Congregations need help in setting priorities, adjusting structures, and understanding and transforming their congregational cultures. Empathetic, yet arms-length facilitation is often needed.
- 14) Congregations need technical assistance. Technology can be harnessed but must be used carefully and wisely. Most congregations can be helped tremendously with a bit of technical expertise. Few congregations have the expertise that can help them.
- 15) Congregations need to speak publicly. They need to find their own voice and they need to find avenues, channels, and voices that speak for them. Broader consultation is critical in order to speak well.
- 16) Congregations need avenues to serve and to respond to ministry needs beyond themselves.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The recent experience with the tsunami in Asia was instructive. Everyone wanted to help, and so the question was: what is the best way to help? The answer in the public media was interesting and unanimous: support the agencies that are already on the ground, that already have experience, know the context and language. That is the best way to ensure that your support will be effectively used to help. This struck me as a very “un-post-modern” answer. While everyone yearned to get involved personally and to go there and even organize small groups to respond, the advice was always: don’t do that. It is equally interesting to me that once the alarm settled down, the media coverage again tended to focus on the small efforts, the individuals who “did something,” in many cases re-inventing wheels and functioning very inefficiently. Congregations are fortunate to be able to set up joint structures that both develop the expertise to respond and have the opportunity for personal and congregational involvement and accountability.

## Organizational Diagram:

I have presented a conceptual framework for missional ecclesiology along with the accompanying structural issues that it raises. The organizational task is threefold:

- 1) Assure that each component identified is indeed focused on the missional vocation of the church.
- 2) Assure that each of the components has a comfortable home in the structure, i.e., that the structure actually facilitates our vocation.
- 3) Assure that there is helpful and easy interaction and accountability between/among components and their respective structures, i.e., that these do not compete, duplicate, or work at cross-purposes with each other, but inform, nourish, and energize each other.

What kind of organizational structure can deliver these objectives? There is no one answer to this question. Van Gelder helpfully sketches biblical evidence that suggests that the church needs to be organized at local, regional, and global levels and that it needs to incorporate “mobile” structures into its organization.<sup>47</sup> While debate has raged in the past about ecclesial organization,<sup>48</sup> I do not believe that there is one perfect organizational structure for the missional vocation of the church. This vocation can be facilitated and encouraged via multiple forms of organization. It is important, however, that all parts of the structure are fully cognizant of the way in which their ministry contributes to the common missional vocation of the church. Many boiling pots do not necessarily make a good meal. Energy (boiling pots) can and must become synergy (a well-planned meal), and synergy is generated when a clear, compelling, and overarching purpose is owned that gives meaning to the existence and effort of the tiniest part.

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<sup>47</sup> cf. Val Gelder, *Essence...* pps. 162-172. He suggests that these structures should be mobile (i.e., have apostolic leaders, mobile teams, and at-large leadership).

<sup>48</sup> However interesting it may be, I will not here get into the debate about congregational autonomy, nuanced levels of presbytery and hierarchy, and spontaneous charismatic leadership and structure. Not only is there no clear design for structure provided in the biblical witness, there will also be historical and cultural dynamics that will inform the discussion about how best to organize. I believe, rather, that if “form follows function,” we must concentrate on making sure the functions we have outlined for a missional church can come to be and that the form facilitates and nourishes these functions to happen.

## Missional ecclesiology summary and checklist:

Elements that need careful attention in missional ecclesiology	Where is primary responsibility lodged?			How are we doing? (rate from 1[low] to 4 [high])				
	Congregations	Area Conferences	Nation-wide Church	1	2	3	4	
Prayer								
Worship								
Bathing in scripture								
Gift discernment								
Disciple-making								
Apostle-making								
Forming a people of God								
Keeping liberating memory alive								
Cultivating Kingdom imaginations								
Church as prophet functions								
Church as priest functions								
Church as sage functions								
Church as king functions								
Proclamation functions								
Service functions								
Communion functions								
Teaching functions								
Keeping the big vocation clear								
Leadership for the missional paradigm								
Specializations								
Cooperation rather than competition								
Mandate and support things done on behalf of the whole								
Institutionalizing good things								
Keep each part healthy								
Pay attention to the individuals								
Pay attention to the system								
Understand the critical role of congregations								
Provide identity								
Provide sense of belonging								

Provide vision		
Articulate belief		
Discernment of tough issues		
Affirmation and exhortation		
Educational resources for new paradigm		
Leadership for new paradigm		
Pastoring leaders		
Channels to do things together		
Help when in trouble		
Help in setting priorities and adjusting congregational culture		
Technical assistance		
Public voice		
Avenues for service		
Mobile structures: apostolic leadership, mobile teams, at-large leadership		

# **Missional Ecclesiology and Leadership: Toward an Understanding of the Emerging Church**

## **Part II**

### **Introduction**

The church needs leaders who will help it discern and implement its purpose as a community formed by God's Spirit and instituted for the service of the God's mission (*missio Dei*). It is often assumed that these leaders will be pastors. Sometimes it is assumed that pastors will not be leaders but functionaries. I believe that pastors must be key leaders but will not be the only leaders in the church. In other words, leadership is not optional for pastors, but rather is part of the essential definition of the role itself. While leadership will surely come from multiple sources, and the pastor's role is not the only resource for leadership in the church, it is a critically important source. To say that "I want to be a pastor but not a leader" is an oxymoron. Not all leaders are pastors, but all pastors are leaders.

### **A few real-life stories**

Let me begin by telling a few stories that can help to focus some key competencies for leadership in the church.

Wayne Gretzky, arguably the best hockey player that has ever played the game, was asked about his uncanny knack of anticipating the puck which so often resulted in scoring or assisting in goal scoring. He replied: "I try not to make a play for the puck where it is but where it's going to be."

My father-in-law, due to his business, did a lot of driving. One day he invited me to go along. We jumped into his pick-up truck and off we went. We ran into an extended torrential downpour. The windshield wipers couldn't keep up; water was gushing down the windshield. He hardly slowed down. Getting a bit nervous, but not wanting to offend, I asked him whether the wipers didn't bother him, make him dizzy, or impair his vision. He replied: "No. I look at the road not the wipers. The wipers help me see the road."

Our backyard has a steep slope to the riverbank. Our son and daughter-in-law decided we needed to have steps going down the slope. They drew a design, figured out what materials would be needed, and asked me to supply the materials. I wanted to know how they would do the job. No amount of diagrams, explanations, or drawings allowed me to see what they were seeing. Finally, they simply said: "Trust us." I did, and they built a solid, functional, and pleasing stairway. Only after they were well on the way could I "see" how their original design could really work.

Last summer, at our annual assembly as Mennonite Church Canada, our department was requested to create a “festival in the park.” This was to be an interactive, creative, dynamic learning opportunity for delegates and community to be exposed to the multi-faceted work of the church in the world. My assistant offered to head up the planning. Meeting after meeting she reported on the progress: singing groups, international stations, entertainment stages, dunk-tank, games, and food. She requested a budget to buy streamers, poles, wire, and other strange things. She explained how the park would be organized. We did a site visit. I am spatially challenged. I will admit I could not visualize what she was doing until 11 am. on the first day of the assembly when I went to help set up the park under her direction. She told us where to put tables, where to string streamers, where to place the stages, how to channel the flow of traffic, and how to make food-lines efficient. Everything went well and the park became what she had visualized it would be six months before.

A few years ago, I was part of the team that negotiated the re-alignment of mission structures in our North American denominations. We were moving from four mission boards, united by geography but separated by function and denominational connection, to two boards, united by function and denomination but separated by geography along national boundaries. We were a year and a half into the process and had produced a “Foundational Document” that outlined the vision, purpose, organization and structure of what we were proposing. One of the Council members who had been involved since the beginning said to me: “This is the first meeting where I’m finally able to see what you’ve been talking about for a long time. I think I can now see how this can work.”

A short while ago, I spent a week with a group of 23 pastors and church leaders in one of the regions of our country. Together we reflected on the culture in which we live, the church in which we work, and the gospel that nourishes our efforts. After a day-long analysis of cultural assumptions that impact our churches, I made the statement: “These are cultural waters our church will need to navigate. Leadership is needed, because the waters are complex. Who are the leaders that will help the church?” They all looked around and tried to think of names of persons they might suggest. After a bit, I suggested that perhaps the leaders that could help the church navigate these waters were right there in the room. There was stunned silence. And then one pastor threw back his head and roared with laughter. Others followed. I asked what was so funny. The laughing pastor said that I totally misunderstood the expected role of the pastor in the church. “There is no expectation from anywhere that leadership is expected to come from pastors. We go to education committee meetings and we are expected not to be too directive. We go to worship committee meetings, and our preferences are supposed to be suppressed. We go to congregational meetings, and we are expected to give a report but not talk. We go to church council meetings and we are expected to follow through on decisions by the council but we are not looked to for direction. We go to the meetings of the regional and national churches and pastors are expected not to be too visible. We are expected to take care of the needs of the congregation, to look after administration, and to preach. But if you’re looking for leadership from pastors, you’re either totally blind, or will need to provide some platforms from which we can exert leadership.”



This analysis of the potential of leadership from pastors seemed to be shared and even assumed by the others in the room. For me, it was a sacred moment. I had just learned a lot about our church, about these colleagues, and about our culture.

## The Nature of Leadership

These stories demonstrate some common competencies or skills that leadership demands.

- 1) **Clear purpose:** The focus on purpose is essential. Someone needs to keep the big picture in mind. Looking “at the road not at the wipers” is not easy. In the church many focus on the “wipers” and get dizzy or lose their way. The ability to look past the frenzy of what is immediately before our eyes and focus on the road that leads us to where we want to go is a critical leadership skill.
- 2) **Imagination:** Leaders need to be able to see what does not yet exist. To visualize the invisible and to begin to act upon it as though its reality is assured is a gift of leadership.
- 3) **Anticipation:** Most people play the puck where it is, not where it will be. Anticipation comes from experience and practice. There is no quick road to anticipate accurately, but it is an essential skill for leadership.<sup>49</sup>
- 4) **See the building blocks needed to move along:** When we can see clearly enough we can identify the materials we’ll need along the way. Without access to materials, imagination, anticipation, and purpose don’t move ahead.
- 5) **Trust:** At some point the vision or the person with the vision needs to be trusted. When Jesus announced that the Kingdom had drawn near, one of the responses he called for was to trust that this was true. Believe it; put your confidence in it. If leaders cannot generate trust, leaders cannot lead.
- 6) **Relationship between vision and organizational structure:** The rubber must hit the road at some point. The vehicles best suited to put vision on the road are the structures we design to put flesh on vision. Without the ability to do this, visions perish and structures often tend to self-perpetuate.
- 7) **Capacity to inspire others:** Those who can imagine something that is not yet need to be able to inspire those who don’t yet see it. I was humbled that the Council member had hung in there for over a year without being able to see clearly what I had seen for a long time. He was inspired by the journey and didn’t want to miss it.
- 8) **Organizational space:** It is surely true that the right to lead must be earned, and that leadership in the church can (and should) come from multiple sources. But the story of the pastors also points to the fact that organizational/structural space needs to be anticipated and provided for leadership to be exerted.

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<sup>49</sup> Drucker, in *Managing...* states: “The most important task of an organization’s leader is to anticipate crisis. Perhaps not to avert it, but to anticipate it. To wait until the crisis hits is already abdication. One has to make the organization capable of anticipating the storm, weathering it, and in fact, being ahead of it. That is called innovation, constant renewal” (p. 9).

- 9) **Authority needs to be entrusted:** The structural “space” provided from which leadership can be exercised means that authority needs to be granted, not only to the person but also to the “space.”<sup>50</sup> Leadership is related to authority, and the leader (often the pastor) is expected to provide an authoritative centre in the rough seas.<sup>51</sup>

### **The biblical mandate for leadership:**

Words derived from “lead” (leader, lead, leadership) appear 372 times in the English Bible.<sup>52</sup> A large percentage of those uses refers to bad leaders and leadership.

“Because they lead my people astray, saying, “Peace,” when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash.”<sup>53</sup>

This is indeed sobering. Why do so many lead the people astray?

Most of the positive references to leadership, on the other hand, refer to God’s leadership:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.”<sup>54</sup>

“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.”<sup>55</sup>

Yet God’s vision is clear. Good leadership is to emerge to lead the people so the people can move towards their destiny in God.

“Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.”<sup>56</sup>

Jesus instructs his disciples that the paradigm for leadership within the nations is not the one to be used within the people of God. There leaders “lord it over them.” But thus it shall not be among us. We are to exercise authority and leadership according to the model of the servant, the one who is willing to suffer, the one who is later identified as the lamb.<sup>57</sup> And the authentic example of good leadership is the lamb himself:

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<sup>50</sup> This has been vigorously debated in Mennonite circles in the last years. Leadership is a gift of the Spirit to the person and to the church. Leadership, or aspects of it, can and must also be earned. The representational role of the “office” of leadership on behalf of the community must also be recognized, regardless of the competence or capacity of the person occupying that office at any given time. For a good introduction to this debate see Esau, *Understanding Ministerial Leadership*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. to Rodney Sawatzky’s essay in Esau, *Understanding... pps. 40-46*.

<sup>52</sup> New International Version

<sup>53</sup> Ezekiel 3:10.

<sup>54</sup> Psalm 23:1-2

<sup>55</sup> Exodus 15:13

<sup>56</sup> Jeremiah 3:15

<sup>57</sup> cf. Mk. 10: 42-44

“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;<sup>58</sup> he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”<sup>59</sup>

It is clear that good leadership is an activity of God that needs to continue within the people of God. Paul includes “leadership” as one of the important gifts of the Spirit to the church:”

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us....if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Consumerist, post-Christendom, and post-modern:**

Leadership will always be exercised within a given context. It is important, therefore, to identify some of the cultural dynamics within which church leadership in Canada (North America) needs to function at the dawn of this new millennium. This is a topic with enough complexity to warrant much more detail. I will limit myself to commenting on only three forces that are shaping the context in which we minister. Church leadership will need to discern these times carefully and help the church to be faithful in this challenging context.

### **Consumerism:**

Our minds are shaped by our cultural focus on consumption. The adage is increasingly true: We do not consume to exist, we exist to consume. Success is measured either by the capacity to generate consumer demand or to satisfy the appetites of the consumer once the demand has been generated. It is no longer enough to say that “the customer (consumer) is always right.” The mantra in our consumerist culture is that whether the consumer is right or not, the consumerist impulse must never be stifled.

It should come as no surprise that the consumerist mentality is also shaping the persons coming to church, the ones who are already there, and the vision for ministry in the church itself. Increasingly the criteria to measure the success of a church are not whether the transforming power of God’s coming Kingdom is being enhanced, but whether the church can meet my needs and the needs of those I care about. When church life is measured by the screen of consumer preferences and demands, then congregational life becomes an ecclesial “mall of America.” If this church “shop” can’t or doesn’t meet my

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<sup>58</sup> I am always surprised yet inspired by this strange collection of images in one phrase: a lamb (a meek and lowly animal normally in need of special care or shepherding), a throne (usually an image of royalty, power, leadership, influence), and a shepherd (one that fights off enemies for the sake of the lambs and leads them to life-giving pasture, water, and shelter). The suggestion that the lamb is on the throne and is the shepherd appears contradictory. Yet it is precisely this seeming contradiction that is at the heart of the Christian understanding of leadership.

<sup>59</sup> Revelation 7:17

<sup>60</sup> Romans 12:6-8

needs, perhaps the next shop will. Purpose does not attract loyalty; satisfying needs does (until that too doesn't deliver). Consumerist impulses are influencing how some churches understand their essential purpose for being. Some preach only the gospel of positive thinking; others encourage seekers with their theology of wealth; others with their promises of answered prayer; others with their guarantee of quality entertainment; still others with promises of physical healing and miracles. The issue, of course, is that these foci for ministry respond primarily to the consumerist impulses embedded in our society and do not represent the transformational gospel of the arrival of God's Kingdom in our midst, as preached by Jesus. The church, in order to fulfill its missional vocation, must strengthen its capacity to respond to these consumerist needs and paradigms with transforming gospel alternatives that reflect the in-breaking of God's coming Kingdom.

### **Post-Christendom:**

The religious/political synthesis forged by the legalization and the eventual compulsory status of the Christian faith in the 4<sup>th</sup> century c.e. is known as Christendom. Stuart Murray helpfully defines post-Christendom as “the culture that emerges as a Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”<sup>61</sup> He identifies the shift for the church as moving from the centre to the margins; from majority to minority; from settlers to sojourners; from privilege to plurality; from control to witness; from maintenance to mission; and from institution to movement.

The Christendom synthesis is rapidly crumbling. While this should be good news for those of a Believer's Church tradition, the perks of Christendom are too deep not to affect even those who have never subscribed, theologically, to the Christendom world. The vestiges of Christendom continue all around us: the church's proper role in society is assumed to be that of priest but not prophet; many still assume that our public institutions such as schools, universities, media, justice system, political structures, and business should have the best Christian virtues at heart and should be dedicated to nourishing them in society; churches still have a favoured position in terms of taxation, charitable status, clergy exemptions, and social programs; prayers are still said in parliament and some schools; the Bible is still used in courts; and public leaders still count on their religious connections to generate support and trust.

But there are also signs that this synthesis no longer enjoys the power and prestige it once did. The voice of the church is largely silenced in public debate; fewer assume that public institutions need to reflect the preferences of religious agenda; church attendance is plummeting (especially in Canada); church budgets are dropping; committed Christians who are seriously connected to the church are in a small minority (approx. 20% of the population in Canada); and the church is being moved to the margins of influence in public life. These shifts are enormous. Especially if we don't understand them, they feel like a threat to the success of the church, even though it may well be the healthiest thing that has happened since the time of Constantine. The impact is felt in the families and the pews of our churches. Church leadership will need to understand the dynamics of this

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<sup>61</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom...* p. 19

shift and help the church navigate this transition. The church will need to understand the positive potential of these shifts for the health of the church and not perceive these shifts only as losses and threats.

### **Post-modernism:**

An equally significant shift impacting our society is the shift from modern to the post-modern assumptions. Modern perspectives are often binary, i.e., they set up either-or dichotomies from which one needs to be chosen. Post-modern perspectives tend to be inclusive. Instead of either-or categories they search for both-and possibilities. Modern perspectives tend toward a search for commonality, that which unites. Post-modern thinkers emphasize difference and divergence. Modernism assumes that there is one rational centre, a meta-narrative, that can make sense of everything. Post-modern proponents suggest that all truth is determined by its relation to a rational centre, but that there are any numbers of such centres possible. Each centre generates its own particular aura or system. There is no external, universal standpoint from which all centres can be evaluated. Any universal claim may be deconstructed to demonstrate its assumptions and self-interest. For example, the modern confidence that the scientific method can be used as an objective centre and as a means to discover overarching truth is subject to deconstruction in post-modern thought, because the person in the lab coat is neither a neutral nor objective observer from outside a system. In post-modern thought, particular experience becomes a legitimate centre for truth, but this experience is not necessarily transferable as “truth” to other rational centres. Truth is thus assumed to be relative, contextual, local, and time-bound. Meta-narratives, if they exist at all, exist only within each particular system clustered around its centre but there is no narrative that encompasses all centres. Conviction organized around each centre is good within that system but not necessarily transferable to other centres. Dialogue and exchange based on the assumptions of your centre are desirable. Diversity is assumed and therefore good. Claims toward unity can be deconstructed to demonstrate its actual non-objectivity. All perspectives are contextual and tribal. There is no truth or fact that is not mediated through the self-interest of someone. Post-modern thinkers reaffirm the presence and the importance of going beyond the material and physical, sometimes identified as spiritual. They are attracted to images, sights, sounds, and smells in addition to ideas and words. They prefer participation over passive observation. They also emphasize community over individualism and the life of the body over isolated efforts. They see systems as organic in which alliances shift rapidly and assumed connections are challenged; indeed, where the centre itself appears diffuse and shifting.<sup>62</sup>

For churches used to modern assumptions, post-modernism represents a tsunami in the way we think about faith, commitment, obedience, and community. Since our allegiance is to the gospel, we need defend neither modern nor post-modern perspectives. Our task is to discern both from perspectives coming from the arrival of God’s Kingdom among

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<sup>62</sup> Football, with its rules, well-defined spaces and limits, and clearly determined procedures is sometimes used to illustrate a modern system. Guerrilla warfare, on the other hand, is sometimes used to illustrate post-modern understandings. Its centre is unknown or shifting; its territory is changing, and its strategies are adaptable.

us. Leadership will need to navigate the waters of this modern/post-modernism shift and lead the church into this changing world.<sup>63</sup>

### **Satisfying and transforming:**

Leadership is not simply a gift of the Spirit to the pastor or other leader; it is a gift to the church. Leadership is a communal gift to build up the body of Christ so that it can fulfill its vocation. The church as a body needs leadership, and the Holy Spirit supplies it.<sup>64</sup> While the gift of leadership is given to persons, the beneficiary of leadership is meant to be the church and ultimately the world as the church is faithful to its vocation.<sup>65</sup>

Any one of the cultural shifts identified above is enough to challenge even the most gifted of leaders. But these are shifts that feed each other and as such the impact on our culture and our church is formidable. Some have suggested that the sheer quantity, depth, and speed in which change is occurring, and its potential to forge new cultural paradigms, are unprecedented in the history of humanity. Other significant paradigm shifts would include the invention of the wheel and of fire, the industrial revolution, the renaissance, the re-imagining of the universe from a flat to a round earth, the impact of Einstein's theory of relativity, and the communications and information revolution of the last several decades. Within these shifts, church leadership is faced with the colossal challenges of witnessing to the compelling nature of the Christian gospel and demonstrating the relevance of the gospel for the new world that is coming. One key issue is whether the church will understand its mission as simply using and serving the cultural assumptions that are emerging, or as discerning and transforming them when needed from the perspectives of the coming Kingdom of God. We turn briefly to that issue now by focusing particularly on needs-based and transformation-based ministry.

We see many needs as more and more persons become victims of the changing values in our society. We encounter the inevitable tension between meeting needs generated and nourished by the consumerist culture, and the vocation of the church to transform the culture that colonizes us. To the degree to which the church is able to address the colonizing "sins," it is faithful to its vocation of dealing redemptively with the sins of the world. To the degree that these same sins begin to dictate how the church can or cannot respond, the church itself becomes a victim of the sins of the culture it is ministering to. Our struggle is to address the needs generated by our culture without ourselves falling prey to the consumerist mentality that more often than not produces the needs we face.

Pastors in particular are caught in this web. They sense a clear call to walk with people in the needs they have, regardless of the source that has produced them. At the same time,

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<sup>63</sup> Leonard Sweet in *SoulTsunami* suggests three possible reactions to the tidal wave of cultural change: denial, hunkering down in the bunker, and hoisting the sail to take advantage of God's wave. He advocates the third option for the church (pps. 18-23).

<sup>64</sup> cf. Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11-13; Titus 1:5; I Peter 5:1-4

<sup>65</sup> cf. Ephesians 4:12-15

they sense a call to transform the sources of the needs so that they will stop generating more victims. How does a pastor balance his/her time between simply responding to the needs around them and work toward transforming the sources that produced the needs in the first place? Or is transformational ministry not the task of pastoral leadership?<sup>66</sup> Many pastors that I know are so busy with needs-based ministry that they cannot give time to transformational ministries even if they would want to.

It is my sense that we meet the particular needs of people not by putting leaders in place who will dedicate all their time and energy to personally meet the needs around them, but by building a healthy body that will respond to needs from the perspective of its Kingdom vocation.<sup>67</sup> The primary mission of a business corporation is to satisfy the shareholders by satisfying the customers. It is hoped that by satisfying the needs of clients the business will flourish and prosper. The primary mission of the church, on the other hand, is to transform lives and the world by conversion to an alternative paradigm for living.<sup>68</sup> Can the needs that we see around us be addressed from the perspective of the

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<sup>66</sup> By reading some descriptions of the pastoral vocation, one would get the impression that it is not the vocation of the pastor to work at transforming the sources that generate need. In the book *Understanding Ministerial Leadership*, ed. by John Esau, three of the writers draw up a list of things expected from pastors (cf. essays by Marlin Miller, Ardean Goertzen, and Marcus Smucker). These lists include ministries of presence, priest, shepherd, watchperson, exercising authority, ministry of the word, caregiver, trust, helper, midwife, equipping, rites/sacraments/ordinances, liturgy, oversight, team-work, character formation, and communication. None of them see the pastor providing significant leadership in transformational or prophetic ministries beyond the internal life of the congregation itself.

<sup>67</sup> In Christendom, the church is assigned the socially acceptable and needed task of being the “chaplain” of society, i.e., the church is given free reign to exercise its “priestly” functions. Society has been much more reluctant to grant to the church the right to exercise its God-given prophetic, sagely, and kingly vocations (see Part I of this paper). An excellent example of this was evident on March 31/05 when Terri Schiavo died in the midst of the raging controversy about whether her feeding tube should be pulled or not because of her vegetative condition. The lawyer of Michael Shiavo, the husband who made this difficult decision, came on television and spoke about the role of the Catholic priest who had been accompanying the Schindler family (Terri’s parents). He outlined how the priest had gone beyond his acceptable duty - to provide “spiritual” support for the family – and had entered into “ideologically based” discourse, calling into question the decisions that had been made by Michael and the courts. He stated something to this effect: “The priest’s role is to comfort, to accompany, to encourage, and to bless. It is not to use his position for ideological purposes, taking advantage of public media to advocate for change in our system. This is not appropriate for a spiritual person, a person in his position.” Regardless of how we feel about the decisions made, the point here is not to advocate or not. The point is that society has assigned an acceptable role for the church and its functionaries, and they should not step beyond the role assigned to them into areas best left to law, courts, and politicians. This lawyer lauded the manner in which Jesse Jackson had “behaved,” as a support to the family. He had stayed within the acceptable boundaries of priestly ministry. The Catholic priest had stepped outside of these boundaries into prophetic, transformational agenda, and that was deemed very inappropriate.

<sup>68</sup> The chaplaincy paradigm (or “spiritual care” as it is often referred to) tends to be needs based, designed primarily to satisfy. Missional ecclesiology tends to be transformation based, responding to the needs as they appear but always with the hope of transforming personal and social reality toward Kingdom of God priorities. This addresses the roots and not merely the symptoms of needs with body life, prophetic witness, Godly exhortation, and kingly power (see Part I of this paper). The story is told of a mountain village whose population lived off of its service to the many victims whose vehicles could not manoeuvre the sharp curves and regularly drove over the cliff. This village had developed a sophisticated infrastructure of service: hospitals, clinics, drug stores, hotels, and restaurants to serve the needs of the victims and their families. When the suggestion was made to improve the road and to pressure car manufacturers to develop

transforming purpose of the church? How can the church legitimately address the needs generated by the sins of our culture without becoming co-dependent on the needs and the sources that generate them?<sup>69</sup>

Church leadership must also exercise the critical function of caring for the system and not only caring for particular individuals within the system.<sup>70</sup> In the long run it is often more helpful to the particular needs of individuals when we pay attention to the system so that it will have the capacity to address those needs from a transformational perspective if needed. This can be a struggle for pastors.<sup>71</sup> Pastors have been trained for “needs driven” ministry, i.e., the needs of whatever person in the congregation tend to take precedence over the needs of the congregation itself. Visitation, for example, becomes a higher need than good preaching. Conflictive situations absorb more time than planning communal worship. Assisting persons to grieve the loss of loved ones becomes a higher priority than making sure the Christian education program is well planned and run. In other words, personal needs tend to take priority over the well-being of the body. Don’t get me wrong. The church should address the needs of people. And leaders should participate in addressing these needs. The problem is that our culture situates our search for health,

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more reliable braking systems, the population was up in arms. Its economy would bust if such innovations were implemented. These folks were better off if victims were generated than if steps were taken to reduce the rate of victimization.

<sup>69</sup> “When Christians uncritically adopt the marketplace language of meeting needs to talk about the gospel, they unwittingly recast life with Christ into something individuals can relate to without conversion, without moral or intellectual transformation, without the lives of those who share God’s creation with us. This language transforms the unfathomable mystery of God that rules over all things into a neatly packaged deity custom-designed to satisfy our self-described desires and appetites. And that is as much an idol as any sacred pillar, pole, or statue fashioned from wood and clay (Deut. 12:2-3)” (Brownson, et.al. *Stormfront*, p. 10).

<sup>70</sup> cf. Galindo, *Hidden lives...* pps. 137-161 for good discussion. I have borrowed some of his ideas in this section.

Marlin Miller (in Esau, *Understanding Ministerial Leadership* p. 64) makes this helpful point in talking about the ministry of oversight: “This particular ministry ... is oriented to the whole group, not only towards specific persons or specific parts of the group. It relates to the whole, tries to get a vision of the whole, tries to be concerned about the overall work of the church. This calls at least partially into question some of the emphases that have developed in our time and context in pastoral ministry. Some of these emphases have gone rather far in focusing pastoral ministry on one-to-one care.”

<sup>71</sup> It was also a struggle for Moses (Exodus 18). Moses tries to be the arbiter and wisdom-provider for the entire people. Jethro, his father-in-law, says that this is not good. It is not good for Moses, who will not be able to withstand the strain, but as importantly it is not good for the people, who have to line up day and night so that their needs can be met. “You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out” (18:18). Jethro’s reorganization alleviates the load for Moses and for the people. Moses needed to learn that his primary responsibility in addressing the needs around him was to make sure the system could function in a healthy way. Jesus’ ministry is similar. While the Bible records those needs he met, there were also many he did not meet. He would withdraw to get away from the needs to be alone. As importantly, he taught the disciples how to respond to the needs around them and sent them out. The exorcisms and the healings were signs of what happens when the power of God’s Kingdom comes near. They were invitations to align with the presence of this Kingdom, and commit to the community of the Kingdom where needs would be addressed from Kingdom perspectives. Leadership must make sure that such a community comes to be and exists.



“life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness”<sup>72</sup> firmly in the realm of private feelings and individual advancement rather than in the shared mission to reconcile the world to which God’s church has been called. The leadership of the church must always work for the welfare of a system that engages needs from the perspective of the transforming power of the Kingdom in our midst. A missional focus tries to bring healing to selfishly focused needs. Often the best way to help healing to happen is to encourage the person to reach out to others in similar or worse situations. A strictly needs-oriented ministry can be a reflection of the seductive, consumer-oriented, “me” focus of our society. The sense that “the church exists to meet my need and if it doesn’t meet it than I will go elsewhere,” is part of that cultural seduction.<sup>73</sup> Often the demands for personal attention reflect the consumerist culture in which we live and breathe, looking to the church to enhance self-esteem, to enrich private lives, and to provide purpose to culturally-driven priorities.<sup>74</sup> It is not the task of ecclesial leadership to meet whatever need motivated by whatever purpose coming from whatever corner, but it is to astutely nurture the system and dedicate time to “...providing the right functions at the appropriate time in ways that enable the system to function in healthy ways.”<sup>75</sup> The church exists to align with the communal task of becoming a sign of the transforming presence of God’s Kingdom on earth.

### **Functions and focus of missional leadership:**

Galindo suggests that leaders have two primary functions: “First, they help organizations perform better the practices that are in place; this is a necessary and pragmatic administrative function. Second, they guide organizations towards doing what they should be doing, but are not. This is the singular prophetic function that is critical to effective congregational leadership.”<sup>76</sup>

This definition raises the question: What are the essential functions and the primary foci of leadership in a missional church? Allow me to suggest a few:

- 1) **Minister in order to release the gifts of the congregation/denomination for the missional vocation of the church.** The church is better understood as a demonstration plot than as a service centre. The function of a service centre is to

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<sup>72</sup> Taken from the American Declaration of Independence (1776). More often than not, “needs” are closely connected to culturally-driven individualistic assumptions rather than Kingdom-driven assumptions geared to the welfare (broadly defined) of community and humanity.

<sup>73</sup> For an excellent discussion about the way in which our consumerist culture has influenced our understanding of leadership, the pastoral task, and the purpose of the church, see Brownson et.al. *Stormfront...* pps. 1-29. Some ideas are borrowed from this discussion.

<sup>74</sup> This is why Eugene Peterson suggests that pastors are “unnecessary.” They are unnecessary to what culture, pastors, and congregations want from them, because our faith is counter what is culturally expected. “The Christian faith is a proclamation that God’s kingdom has arrived in Jesus, a proclamation that puts the world at risk. What Jesus himself proclaimed and what we bear witness to is the truth that the sin-soaked, self-centred world is doomed.” (Eugene Peterson and Marva Dawn, in *Unnecessary Pastor...* pps, 2-4).

<sup>75</sup> Galindo, *Hidden lives...*, p. 185

<sup>76</sup> Galindo, *Hidden lives...* p. 139

re-fuel, re-charge, re-tire, repair, and lubricate the vehicle so that it can continue to be useful. But the vehicle itself is not an agent of change. Indeed the activity inside the centre may be quite different than the activity of the vehicle once it leaves. It is different with a demonstration plot.<sup>77</sup> The plot is a living sign of the changes it advocates and demonstrates its lesson to those who want to learn from it. The activities inside the plot reflect the transformation advocated beyond it.<sup>78</sup> The purpose of the plot is to affect change beyond itself and to show that it can be done. The task of Christian leadership is to nurture the health of the plot so that its body-life becomes an alternative to the outside world and thereby generates the potential of transforming it.

- 2) **Pay careful attention to the system and what it needs to be healthy.** I have indicated earlier that this is difficult, especially for pastors. It is so for several reasons. One, because of our Christendom expectations, persons attracted to the pastoral vocation are often those who have particular gifts to attend to personal needs. Second, the success of pastors is often judged by the way they “give up everything for my needs.” Third, training received by pastors often does not include dynamics of systems analysis, organizational transformation, activity evaluation, and other skills needed to pay attention to the system.<sup>79</sup> Thus, it feels like betraying expectations, aptitude, and training to work intentionally to ensure the health of the system. Galindo’s book on the *Hidden Lives of Congregations* is helpful. He identifies often hidden dynamics at work in congregational life that inhibit the healthy ministry and identity of congregations. By paying close attention to the system, leaders can identify these glass ceilings and address them so that they don’t exercise too much influence in decision-making.
- 3) **Focus on process.** Too often we are tempted by the allure of answers and solutions. Leaders who pay attention to the health of the system will be more concerned with process. Answers are a dime a dozen. Everybody has them. Ultimately, the authority of the church does not lie in the answers it gives. Rather, the authority of the answers lies in the integrity of the church that gives them. Did the answers come via adequate discernment of scripture, listening to God’s voice, prayer, dialogue, research, and debate? Or did the answers come via power-brokering, inadequate exposure to data, lack of listening and hearing, or by giving an inordinate amount of attention to tradition, routine, and pressure? For the health of the system, someone must focus on the process. It is less important that the church speak than to ensure that the process that gives it the authority to speak was good. If the process has been good then the answers are the best the church can do at that point. Then we can legitimately say: “It seemed good to the Spirit

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<sup>77</sup> See Van Gelder, *Essence...* pps. 99-100

<sup>78</sup> For example, if the church wants to advocate for justice, its internal life must be just; if it wants to advocate for equality, its internal life must reflect this value.

<sup>79</sup> I, for example, have 6 years of formal “church-related” training beyond my basic university degrees. I have never yet been required or requested to take a course in any discipline related to organizational design, transformation of structures, evaluation of program, or systems analysis. I am aware that these are not required or provided in our undergraduate Christian colleges either. Note the lists provided for the pastoral vocation in footnote 65 above.

and to us.”<sup>80</sup> Such answers demand the respect they deserve, even if the answers go against my personal biases. It is more difficult to submit to the answers of the church when the process has not reflected its missional vocation in the world. Answers can and do change. Solutions come and go. Sometimes they mirror my preferences sometimes they don’t. The authority of the church lies in its ability to process things with careful discernment of the Spirit of God. Process is when peoplehood engages a deliberate discernment/implementing cycle.<sup>81</sup> Then the church has spoken, but it is not the final word. The church can speak again. It is the task of leadership to ensure that the process of discernment and speaking is a worthy reflection of the vocation of the church. In such cases, the answers that the church provides reflect the moral authority it is meant to have and merit the attention they deserve.

- 4) **Inspire with vision.** The reason for the existence of the church should be strong, compelling, and comprehensive enough to engage and motivate all connected to it. To be the church is not simply one more of the many options calling for our loyalties. It is the option that aligns with God’s hope to change and to save the creation that he loves so much.<sup>82</sup> It is critical that church leadership can focus the compelling purpose of the church in ways that are simple, understandable, and inspirational, and lead its congregation to do the same.<sup>83</sup> Leadership must nurture the capacity of the church to define vision, and the church must nurture its capacity to develop leaders that are capable of doing so. This is a symbiotic

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<sup>80</sup> Acts 15:28

<sup>81</sup> Stahlke says that “process is the structure in motion” (Stahlke, *Governance...* p. 93). I prefer the more organic definition indicated in the text above.

<sup>82</sup> Ephesians 1:15-22 provides just a glimpse of the enormity of the vocation the church has been called to. The tendency in the Christendom world has been reductionist, i.e., to reduce the vocation of the church to some minimal services that it can provide to the society, services that must, however, be domesticated and subsumed by other goals of the society. The Letter to the Ephesians is a gift to all who seek a compelling and significant vocation for the church and a threat for all who don’t. One of the best windows into this book is the commentary by Tom Yoder Neufeld who exegetes the breath-taking vision for the church embedded in this letter.

<sup>83</sup> I have not yet been convinced by what appears to be a growing consensus in literature related to leadership in the church that “vision is a systemic function that is the pastor’s prerogative” (Galindo, *Hidden...*, p. 139). Galindo goes on: “Vision is a function of leadership and it is the leader who must provide it” (p. 140); “Vision is not acquired by consensus - it is the exclusive function of leadership” (p. 141); “Providing vision is the leader’s prerogative; in a congregation, that leadership function falls to the pastoral leader” (p. 143); but then suggests that a way of determining whether the vision is authentic is that a “genuine vision will outlive the visionary” (p. 143). I find myself objecting to this perspective for two reasons: one, because leadership is a function of the body and it is measured by how well the body is able to be the discerning community that it is meant to be, discernment which surely must also include the capacity to vision, and two, if true vision is to outlive the visionary, then logically the next pastor can’t fulfill his/her leadership function as a visionary for the congregation. It would seem wiser to take seriously Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s adage that “The group is the womb of the leader” (quoted by Galindo, p. 138). I would prefer to see leadership developing its capacity to lead the group through the necessary processes that help it to generate and “birth” good leadership and vision. It is the process of developing vision that demands good leadership, not the vision that necessitates that its source be the pastor.

relationship that strengthens both the role of leadership and the authenticity of the body that calls leadership into being.<sup>84</sup>

- 5) **Provide language for what the church is experiencing.** This is one of the most critical tasks of leadership. I remember a young man who was experiencing severe depression resulting in lack of focus, constant tiredness, and mental disorientation. He was convinced he was “going crazy.” After a few sessions with a counselor, she was able to name his experience, show the diagnosis to him in a medical textbook, and look at suggested remedies. He testified later that it was the naming process that was the most significant. “This wasn’t some unknown virus attacking my mind.” This was the beginning of a fairly quick recovery. My experience is that the same is true in the church. I mentioned earlier the phenomenon of the windshield wipers and our capacity to focus on the road. When we don’t have the language to name what is happening, we get dizzy and anxious. Sometimes the language may not be entirely understood, but this is less important than naming it. Words and concepts like post-modernism, crumbling Christendom, materialism, secularism, and relativism help to understand the contextual dynamics that impact our church. Once named, strategies can be sought. Without adequately understanding what’s happening to us, we get disoriented and afraid. Change inevitably generates resistance. Changes that have no names, even if they are positive, feel like threats. It is critical that change be accompanied by vision, which is one of the very few things capable of overcoming the resistance to change.<sup>85</sup> Leaders play a critical role in finding names for our experiences, both for the negative experiences that feel like threats and for the positive vision that suggests an appropriate pathway through the threat. It is part of Jesus’ mandate to be able to discern the times as we do the weather.
- 6) **Build a team and serve it.** A team of energized and willing persons, committed to dedicating their talents and gifts to advance the compelling purpose of the church, is critical for good leadership.<sup>86</sup> Seek out such a team and serve it, nurture

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<sup>84</sup> Too often the purposes articulated for the existence of the church are not compelling, either because these purposes have been reduced and limited so much that the church appears to be a sick patient looking for ways to help others get out of bed, or because there is no particular Christian content to the purposes articulated. My experience has been that often our articulation of purpose of the church could just as well be the vocation of a sports team, a community club, or a different religious body. Leadership needs to be able to state the distinctive vocation of the church clearly, so that it is inspiring and Christian.

<sup>85</sup> Galindo, *Hidden...* p. 150 states: “Change that lacks the focus of vision can create existential havoc because it creates disequilibrium, uncertainty, and makes day-to-day life chaotic and unpredictable. People understandably feel threatened and out of control when the processes or structures they’ve depended on are dismantled or taken away.”

<sup>86</sup> I experienced this first hand when we lived in Bolivia. One of our gifted seminary students took on the challenge of leading a notoriously conflictive and dysfunctional congregation. This congregation had a long history of division, power struggles, factionalism, and squabbles. Everyone wondered how inexperienced Jorge would work with such a situation. Jorge, gifted in music, began by responding to the interest of three young adults to have a singing quartet. He spent an inordinate amount of time with these three men who were inspired by his teaching and vision for the church and who loved to sing. As always, people began to leave because of petty squabbles. Jorge’s quartet soon became an octet, and then a mixed choir. In a short time, the energy and enthusiasm of this growing and vital core group assumed the leadership of the church. There was a complete “change of the guard,” and the congregation grew from a handful of disgruntled

it, provide the tools it needs to move ahead. Leaders are often tempted to spend most of our time on the unmotivated. While it is important to keep expanding the circle of the energized, it is also important not to allow the unmotivated to become the primary obstacle to the potential of the system. One writer has correctly noted that “the unmotivated are notoriously invulnerable to insight.”<sup>87</sup> Some advocate for an inversion of the leadership pyramid, putting the servant leader at the bottom rather than creating a hierarchical leadership model from the top.<sup>88</sup> I believe that the concept of the pyramid itself is faulty when thinking about the role of leadership in a Kingdom organization. Whether a pyramid is right-side up or up-side down, it is still a pyramid. It points either up or down. Neither points forward. By turning the pyramid on its side we may be getting closer to the way we would visualize the role of leadership in a missional church. The tip of the pyramid becomes a point where the Kingdom paradigm penetrates the worldly options around us. Or it could represent the role of leadership in moving a Kingdom community forward to engage the world with the gospel. Either way, both leadership and the compelling purpose of the church are moving horizontally, engaging and growing, and the community is moving. And there is a team dedicated to help it along.

- 7) **Build on the strengths and use them to develop the areas of weakness.** The temptation for most congregations and organizations is to pay most attention to their areas of weakness. If the congregation doesn't sing well, hire a music minister. If its youth group is weak, hire a youth pastor. If administration is poor, tell your pastor to spend less time on good preaching in order to concentrate on what is not well done. One congregation had a vibrant seniors group but a weak youth group. The proposal was to hire a youth pastor. After careful thought the congregation decided rather to hire a coordinator for the seniors. By helping the seniors analyze the situation of the church, they were inspired to pay special attention to the youth of the congregation. The youth group grew and they in turn decided to help the children's Sunday school that needed some new energy. Many weak aspects of the life of the congregation were strengthened by focusing energy on the strengths.
- 8) **Implement incremental, not revolutionary, changes in historic and established congregations.**<sup>89</sup> Galindo and Butler Bass are especially helpful in

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persons to a dynamic, energized, creative, and vibrant congregation. This shift was most clearly signaled in a Christmas-eve service where this motley collection of untrained and mediocre singers (at best) performed an amazing rendition of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, in full four part harmony, accompanied by Jorge on his guitar. There was no doubt that the personality, vision, and purpose of the congregation had shifted and that leadership had changed hands. Many of the old guard began to trickle back, but now infected by the new vision and enthusiasm of the core. The congregation became the church.

<sup>87</sup> Edwin Friedmann, quoted by Galindo in *Hidden Lives...* p. 201

<sup>88</sup> Cf. to the five actions of a servant-leader by Ken Jennings. He understands one aspect of servant-leadership as “upending the pyramid” (Jennings: *The Serving Leader*), 2003.

<sup>89</sup> The bibliography provided with this paper refers to some resources that advocate “paradigm busting imaginations” and revolution instead of evolution (cf. Frost/Hirsch, *The Shaping...*, p. 6-7). This may be useful for new church plants, but is not highly useful for established congregations. There are other resources that helpfully suggest things that established congregations can do to recover their missional

this area. Butler Bass suggests that too often we are tempted to “de-traditionalize,” meaning a “process whereby received traditions no longer provide meaning and authority in everyday life,” and thereby are eliminated.<sup>90</sup> She suggests instead an effort to “re-traditionalize,” i.e., re-investing in the deep spiritual traditions of the past and re-shaping these traditions in ways that respect their roots and creatively apply them to the contemporary situation.<sup>91</sup> She provides many examples of congregations that have nourished their capacity to re-traditionalize and cites evidence of significant recovery of energy, purpose, vision, and even growth. She suggests that while denominations need to find ways to creatively “re-tradition,” the non-denominational church needs to find a way of “traditioning.” Those congregations that find intentional and incremental ways of introducing meaningful exercises (be they liturgical or ministry) into their lives become “practicing” congregations. The impact for recovering the vocation of the church is dramatic. Leadership needs to be creative to discover ways of doing this in our setting.

- 9) **Exercise both professional will and personal humility:**<sup>92</sup> The suggestion to take seriously a combination of professional will and humility comes from a popular best-seller, one of the myriad of books about “effective leadership” on the secular market today. The reader may find this source disquieting. After all, Collins does not write from a Christian perspective, nor does he address Christian organizations or investigate Christian leadership. I do include it, however, because of his testimony that this was a surprise finding in their research. Collins had instructed his researchers not to focus the success of corporations by assuming that success is related to the top leadership. But in each case where they found not only “good” companies but “great” companies, they discovered two additional characteristics of the leadership that were undeniable. I include them here for our consideration because these findings are indeed interesting also for the church. Great companies, says Collins, have executive leadership that exercises tenacious professional (and political) will along with very evident personal humility.<sup>93</sup>

In terms of professional will, Collins finds that such leaders:

- demonstrate unwavering resolve to do what must be done to generate long-term results, no matter how difficult;
- set high standards for building an enduring company;
- create superb results;
- look in the mirror not out the window to attach blame for poor results.

In terms of personal humility he finds that such leaders:

- demonstrate compelling modesty, shun publicity, and are never boastful;

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health (cf. Galindo, *The Hidden Lives...* and Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation...*). I suggest that for most established congregations, these resources may be more relevant and helpful.

<sup>90</sup> Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation...* p. 29.

<sup>91</sup> She refers specifically to the Protestant past and traditions.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Collins, *Good to Great*, pps. 17-40.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Collins, p. 36.

- act with quiet, calm determination, relying more on professional standards than on charisma to motivate;
- channel ambitions into the company not into their own egos, setting up great leadership transitions rather than transitional dysfunctions;
- look out the window not in the mirror to apportion credit for the success of the company.

In our day where egocentrism, self-promotion, charismatic qualities, ability to attach blame to others and take credit for yourself, competition, and climbing the ladder of success are assumed to be part and parcel of good leadership, these findings by Collins are interesting: all-the-more so because they came as a surprise. Real “greatness” in leadership seems to reflect the exhortation and advice of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. That’s how leaders function among the nations (gentiles), but among you it must not be so. Among you the greatest leader will be the servant of all who is able to instill kingdom values into those who follow.<sup>94</sup> And we must not conform to this world but be transformed by a bigger picture, the picture of what God wants for the world. We must not think more highly of ourselves than we should, but provide the leadership that is needed so that an alternative-minded people can demonstrate the will of God on earth.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

Leadership in the church has much in common with leadership in other organizations. But leadership in the church must not lose sight of the missional vocation of the body it is leading. Leadership must always exegete the faith which it holds, the context in which it ministers, the scripture that shapes it, the persons that form it, and the activities that proceed from it. We have attempted to provide some guidance to understand the nature of leadership itself and competencies and skills needed to lead. Many of these competencies are widely applicable to many organizations beyond the church. We have also attempted to highlight some of the contextual influences within which leadership needs to be exercised, and we focus the priorities that are crucial for leadership to pay attention to. We have also highlighted the impact of some major shifts in cultural paradigms that we are experiencing. The shift from viewing the purpose of the church as transformational to being a needs provider is a significant shift that permeates the experience of all congregations and church programs.

Many images of effective leadership have been suggested. Sometimes we understand the church to be like an aircraft carrier that wants to steer a different course or turn around. This requires one leader at the steering wheel who looks for icebergs, and begins to rotate the huge wheel that will slowly move the giant vessel around. It is a long process and fraught with the complexities that the

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<sup>94</sup> Mark 10:42 ff.

<sup>95</sup> cf. Romans 12. It would be an interesting exercise to compare this entire chapter of Paul with the “surprise” findings of greatness in Collins. The connections literarily jump out at us.

momentum of its weight and speed generate. Another image could be the leadership seen in a school of fish moving from feeding ground to feeding ground. While the school can be as large as the aircraft carrier, leadership is exercised very differently. There are multiple sources of leadership, each one spontaneously reacting to the stimuli it is experiencing. This often appears to be more “flitting” than leading, but the school as such does reach its goal. It is more spontaneous, more flexible, and faster.<sup>96</sup>

Sometimes there are great advantages to move like an aircraft carrier. There are things that should take much time to change. At times the church must function like a school of fish, flitting, adjusting, adapting, and following multiple sources of leadership. It is difficult to insist on only one model.

We can be sure that the Spirit of God will be with us in this process. We will be encouraged and accompanied by the Spirit. God’s wisdom will be provided. The key is for the church and church leaders to remain open to the prodding of the Spirit as the church adapts to the ever-changing context in which it ministers.

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<sup>96</sup> These images are suggested by Leonard Sweet in *SoulTsunami...*



## Missional leadership summary and checklist:

Elements that need careful attention in missional leadership	Where is primary responsibility lodged?			How are we doing? (rate from 1[low] to 4[high])				
	Congregations	Area Conferences	Nation-wide Church	1	2	3	4	
Clear purpose								
Imagination								
Anticipation								
Seeing the building blocks needed to move along								
Trust								
Relationship between vision and organizational structure								
Capacity to inspire others								
Primarily designed to satisfy needs								
Primarily designed to transform according to Kingdom priorities								
Help to church do better what it is already doing								
Help the church do better what it should be doing								
Minister to release the gifts of the church for its missional vocation								
Pay careful attention to the needs of the system and help it to be healthy								
Focus on process								
Inspire with vision								
Provide language for what the church is experiencing								
Build a team and serve it								
Build on strengths and use these to address weaker areas								
Implement incremental, not revolutionary, changes in established, historic congregations								
Exercise professional and political will								
Exercise humility								

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