Congregations: Moving Toward Transformation

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Mission Statement
An Online, Open-Access, International Journal

Common Ground Journal (*CGJ*) is a publication of the CanDoSpirit Network and is published twice annually as a resource for Christian congregations seeking to understand and faithfully live out their calling as the people of God in the world. The primary audience for CGJ is thoughtful Christians in congregations who are catalysts for growth within their own churches.

CGJ is devoted to the development of strong, faithful churches whose life and ministry grow out of the church's nature as the people of God. They are organized and led in a manner consistent with their nature and mission. They continually ask, "What does it mean to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world today?"

CGJ is a resource for congregational development. We invite scholars and thoughtful Christians in congregations around the world to stimulate inquiry, reflection and action around issues central to the life and ministry of the gathered community of faith. We invite those who serve as leaders in congregations, mission agencies, parachurch organizations, relief and development work, higher education, and non-traditional leadership development to apply their scholarship and expertise in these fields to the context of the local church. We encourage members of congregations to address the broader church with insights grounded in a thoughtful examination of Scripture, and in their own experiences as part of communities of faith in the world.

CGJ is international in scope. We draw on the rich resources of the church around the world to provide a variety of voices and perspectives on issues facing the church. Writers are encouraged to be specific to their own culture and context. In order to contribute to the development of indigenous literature, articles may be submitted in a language other than English.

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The *Common Ground Journal* welcomes articles from scholars and discerning Christians. Each issue will feature invited articles around a theme, as well as articles received through open submissions. Open submission articles are reviewed by members of the Editorial Review Committee who make recommendations to the editor regarding their publication.

General Guidelines
Common Ground Journal seeks to stimulate Christian Churches to thoughtful action around their calling to be the people of God in the world. All articles should be grounded both in theology and the life of the church. Writers are encouraged to write to and about their own cultures and contexts. CGJ invites submissions in the following categories:

- Articles that stimulate thinking and reflection on the nature of the Church

- Articles that link the nature of the Church to its life and work in the world

- Articles that explore the integration of theology and social sciences in relation to life and work of the Church

- Essays on truths gleaned from the interplay of theory and practice, theology and experience in the active life of faith

- Articles that present insights from congregations attempting to live out their identity as the people of God in world

- Articles based on responsible qualitative research designed to inform a local congregation's understanding of its life and ministry

- Articles that raise questions that the Christian community needs to explore in becoming the people of God in the world

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Articles should be approximately 2500 to 3500 words in length. Book reviews and essays should be shorter.

Language and Foreign Languages
Articles should be written in clear narrative prose. Readers can be expected to be familiar with the language of the Bible and theology, but will not necessarily have formal education in these fields. Please avoid academic language and discipline specific terms. Provide clear definitions and examples of important terms not familiar to a general audience. Use explanatory footnotes sparingly; explanations and examples in the text of articles are preferred.

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From the Editor
By Joseph Cookston

Congregations: Thick Gatherings

Congregation is a term rich in meaning and experience. James Hopewell observes that "congregations everywhere are thick gatherings of complicated actions, each parish distinctive in its expression, each possessing its own genius yet incarnating in that peculiarity the worldly message and mission of Christ" (Hopewell, 17).

As I think back, the congregation of my growing up seemed so simple. It was housed in a small, white clapboard building of very few rooms. Actually, the structure was originally a one-roomed school house brought into town to serve as our church building. Life in that congregation, from the viewpoint of a young boy, was quite uncomplicated. You simply went to church, attended VBS, went to youth rallies, did Sunday school, walked slowly as a king in the outdoor nativity, played on the church softball team (poorly), remembered to change to flats after two sharps, and gave your tithe on your lawn mowing earnings. How hard can it be!

However, from a pastor's viewpoint of three and half decades, congregational life seems to have become much more complicated. Experience has bumped me into those thick gatherings of complicated actions that Hopewell describes. Congregations are fascinating. Congregations are perplexing. Congregations are worthy of study from a variety of viewpoints.

By nature, congregations are collective. They are like reunions: shared stories, celebrations, remembering, intersecting generations. They are like enterprises: work projects, mission endeavors, outreach efforts, neighborhood face lifts. They are like strategies: decades of problem solving, patterns of behavior, agreed upon approaches to fussing together, rituals of conflict and resolution, methods of responding to the new, processes for embracing the future.

Because they are gatherings of people, congregations are social phenomena. The dynamics of human interaction and human ways of coming together have powerful influence on the life and behaviors of congregations. With the possibility of five

generations stirring together, congregational life cannot help but be rich in human dynamic and social interaction.

Because congregations are representations of the wider reign of God, congregations are reflections of the Divine. Where the people of God gather, where they worship, where they do their works of compassion, healing and justice—those places when they are expressed in and through a cohesive body of believers are indwelled with the presence and activity of God.

To the extent that congregations are faithful to God's calling for a particular place at a particular time for a particular purpose, it is quite possible that they can be described as the new wine skins of the Gospel of Christ. These are the wineskins that not only hold the Gospel but also in their own genius are the incarnation of the message and mission of Christ.

In this issue of *Common Ground Journal*, thoughtful writers come together to think carefully about this idea of congregation. Some parse the idea of congregation in general; others view congregation from particular aspects of ministry.

To begin, Linda Cannell explores alternate ways to envision leadership and organization related to congregations. Beware, the conventional may be suspect. Peter Cha recognizes a major socio-cultural shift in many parts of the world and relates the challenges for congregations in connecting the implicit theology of congregational life with the explicit theology of a congregation's teaching and preaching.

Then, Ted Kautzmann takes us into a Latin American congregational setting with an ethnographic study of congregational retreats that fit well into the framework of initiatory rites as described in some theories of ritual. These theories suggest the retreats are effective in transforming conferees and revitalizing congregations.

Robert Kasper's article (reprinted in Spanish from *KAIRÓS* No. 42 / enero - junio 2008) reflects on the role of theological education in relation to pastoral development. He asserts that traditional methodology tends to produce graduates who believe that they have the authority to rule the church. A better option is "holistic formation"—practical training for ministry that incorporates being, knowing and doing into every course.

Four pastoral essays consider congregational leadership issues. Daryl Busby, through a hypothetical yet quite fitting vignette, suggests reliable ministry principles for theological reflection. Steve Wimmer's writing is spurred by a simple question about

how to become a member of a local congregation. Elizabeth Wourms makes a strong appeal for congregational transformation through the commitment of present leaders to investing in and equipping next generation leaders. From his expertise in spiritual formation, John Ackerman presents a helpful framework for leader and congregational discernment.

Ed Seely's workshop design completes this edition of CGJ by presenting a flexible format for engaging a group of leaders to consider ways a congregation's worship experiences can become more generationally inclusive.

As I read through and edited these articles, I could hear my colleagues saying to me, "Joe, though we might wish it were different, congregational life certainly is complicated. At times, quite complicated. Congregations really are thick gatherings." Down deep I know that and down deep I embrace that. I am a student of congregations. I invite you to join with me in deepening our understanding of congregation through the insightful writings of these our ministry colleagues.

A few years ago I ran across what I received as a helpful insight and personal challenge. It comes from congregational researcher James Wind. He uses the term culture as one of the lenses through which to understand congregation life.

> The discovery of congregational culture poses an interpretive challenge as sizable as that presented by the scriptures themselves. Think of how much we invest in preparing people to exegete the scriptures. We need to make an equal investment in preparing people to exegete congregational life (Wind, 105).

Enjoy exegeting congregation; enjoy pondering this issue.

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About the Editor

Joseph Cookston serves Salem Church of God in northwest Dayton, Ohio as staff administrative pastor. As pastor, workshop designer and facilitator, teacher, and leader encourager, he is a life-long participant in and student of congregational life.

Trying to Get it Right: Taking Seriously the Church as a People Gathered by God

By Linda M. Cannell

Abstract. This article explores alternate ways to envision leadership and organization related to congregations. The primary tasks for members of congregations are to discern their identity and purpose as the people of God, and to live consistently in relation to that identity. It takes more than the ordinary conventional patterns of leadership and organization to help the people of God accomplish these tasks. Therefore, this article invites the reader on a journey toward suitable organization for maturing congregations.

It seems that every decade or so, the institutional form of the church reinvents itself. It is no wonder that some members of congregations weary of proposals to adopt the next "new" approach to congregational life and ministry. One pastor of a mega-church observed recently that his church was now a traditional church as new forms make their way onto the stage!

The focus of this article is not to disparage particular forms of church life or structure. We should know by now that forms come and go. More to the point, how do we think about the inevitability of institutional structure in relation to leadership and congregational development, and to congregational development and theological education?

A Sign of Maturing Leadership: Beginning to Understand God's Purposes for God's People

A maturing understanding of the character and role of leadership corresponds with the way one views organizational structure. Consider a biblical example. Moses' father-in-law Jethro devised an organizational structure that is sometimes idealized in how-to-do-it leadership texts. I tend to concur with Tom Bloomer's assertion that Christian management teaching has focused on Exodus 18 as illustrating a management principle to be put into practice, with its mathematical, pyramidal authority structure, forgetting that this plan was given to Moses as an interim solution at the time of Israel's

immaturity.[1] The more significant lessons about how to lead a people are found closer to the end of Moses life. For example, in Exodus 33 a more seasoned Moses asked God to show him his glory. The passage takes on greater significance when it is compared with events described in Exodus 3. Chapters 3 and 33 describe essentially the same thing— God showing Moses his glory. In Exodus 3, God commands Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the people of God. In Exodus 33, Moses had learned a great deal more about what that command actually entailed, and the nature of his role in relation to God's purpose. God manifested himself as powerfully in Exodus 3 as he did in chapter 33; however, the difference is found in Moses' readiness for and perception of God's appearance. In Exodus 33, Moses' statements about the forming of a people were extraordinarily profound, much more profound than he could ever have imagined in Exodus 3 when he was being asked to return to Egypt as Deliver. In Exodus 33, Moses said, "We are not even a people unless you are with us." In Exodus 3 he was more concerned about himself and what the people would think of him. Exodus 33 reveals Moses' more mature understanding of God's purpose for this emerging nation.

The story of Jethro's plan tempts us to equate success in congregational leadership with creating efficient structures to manage groups of people. The profound lesson that Moses had to learn, and the profound lesson that we all have to learn, is that efficient systems are not necessarily a sign that a congregation has finally got it right. Our limited understanding of what is "right" can only be found in the growing apprehension of *God's* intentions for the people that *God* has gathered to accomplish *God's* purposes.

Purposes of Organizational Structures in Congregations

The term 'learning organization,' popularized by Peter Senge and others, suggests that entire organizations are able to learn, and must learn if they are to develop. Organizations are viewed as living systems rather than as rational, if not mechanistic, structures put in place to manage people and product. While the idea of a learning organization has proven to be easier to write about than to accomplish, the notion is sound. Congregations as institutions require certain organizational procedures for legal and functional reasons. However, the church is also something theological, a people of

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[1] Tom Bloomer is Provost, University of the Nations, YWAM

God who are expected to learn and practice attitudes and behaviors pleasing to God. Theologically, this learning will be complete only in eternity. Therefore, the maturing of the character God expects is the project of a life time—lifelong learning for congregations if you will.[2] A congregation will never be perfect, its behaviors never fully mature, no matter how polished its programs, attractive its promotion, smoothly executed its services, or well run its business meetings. In fact, a flawless appearance is probably a sign that all is not well! In effect, congregations and leaders of congregations will never 'get it right.' In this regard, Ted Ward's image of organizations as leaky boats is apt. As leaders we will spend all our years of service in organizations bailing!

If becoming the people of God can be differentiated from the quest for institutional success, then questions can be asked about what organizational processes will foster the congregation's *awareness* of its identity and purpose as the people of God; encourage corporate *reflection* (and, when necessary, repentance) concerning differences between corporate behavior and what God clearly expects of the people of God; and to provide opportunity for all members to *practice* the character God expects.

Trying to get *that* sort of organization right is much more difficult than organizing programs, services, committees, and the other familiar patterns of congregational life. It is necessary at times to write job descriptions, create statements of purposes and mission, and present plans for this and that, and so on. But, the more difficult and absolutely essential task is to envision organizational processes that will enable a congregational community to learn how to be the people of God, and to act on that knowledge. Moses ultimately did learn the difference between organizing a nation and leading a people.

Organizational Processes for Maturing Congregations

The church as an institution is essentially a human creation with certain organizational structures and procedures. Dynamics inherent in these structures and procedures profoundly affect the behavior and attitudes of people in congregations. Structures communicate. They affect the nature of relationship; they show what a congregation believes about power and authority; and they reveal a congregation's

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[2] A simple way to gain insight into the character God mandates is to read through all the letters to the churches in the New Testament and list the admonitions, commands, encouragements and descriptions of the churches.

attitude toward diversity and difference of perspective. Thoughtful leaders pay attention to the ways in which organizational structures encourage productive dialogue, planning, decision-making, evaluation, conflict resolution, and so on.

Because organizational processes are fallible, and carried out by fallible people, it is wise to envision organization as allowing for mature and immature responding. Effective organization nurtures relationship, fosters development, recognizes personal and corporate growth, and provides room for responsible action. For instance, at some points trust building is needed; however, the building should lead to respectful relationships. At times guidance is needed; but, pastors at some point need to realize that the sheep must become shepherds. Training is required at various times; but without empowerment and the embrace of responsibility, members of congregations are kept in a perpetual state of dependent ministry. Likewise teaching is effective as people commit to lifelong learning. Maturing congregations allow for the voice of wisdom, create space for people to try—however imperfectly, anticipate immature responses, and encourage personal and corporate reflection. At each stage of a congregation's development, leaders learn to ask the right questions, and recognize the importance of worship and ritual.

Organizational processes that enable the spiritual development of congregations are more likely to accomplish the following purposes:

- They keep before the congregation the identity and character God expects.

- They enable diverse perspectives to be heard; and "authorize" the voice(s) of wisdom from within the congregation that, when needed, will confront, admonish, correct, encourage.

- They lead the congregation to seek the mind of God, leaving the way open for the Holy Spirit to communicate the mind of God in the midst of the congregation.

- They move a people to embody knowledge and character in action, service and justice.

Because a congregation has both a theological and institutional character, certain basic Christian commitments are practiced to energize the congregation. For example,

- Worship brings us before God and obligates response. Maturing congregations seek to learn the meaning of worship. Consumerism and entertainment give way to questions about what God requires in worship.

- Teaching and the commitment to learning deepen understanding and responsible action. Maturing congregations recognize that discipleship is not optional.

- Service engages the people of God with real issues in societies. Maturing congregations recognize that they are communities of reconciliation, seekers of justice, and a grace-full presence in society.

Certain skills and actions accompany the commitments that distinguish the people of God. For example, maturing congregations learn the art of dialogue that is 'more than just talk.' They are comfortable with silence, and are learning how to open their hearts and minds to God. Evidences of maturing relationship are seen as the community interacts across cultural, social, gender and age boundaries. People moving toward maturing give time and place to hear those who are 'apt to teach' and not novices. Opportunity is created for corporate and individual reflection on experience, inquiry into questions of faith and issues requiring response, reading, discussing, developing and executing proposals for service. Feasts, rituals, and/or festivals are created to celebrate God's past and present acts among his people.

Congregations don't go back to "square one" each time there is an infusion of new people. Church leaders and members devise ways to help newcomers understand distinguishing commitments, corporate history and opportunities for service. As hospitable communities, maturing congregations also devise ways for the gifts and experience of the newcomer to become known so that he or she can enrich the life of the congregation. In this way, the church as the people of God becomes a 'living system.'

Congregational Practices

In recent years, Craig Dykstra and others have attempted to describe and define "congregational practices" suggesting that habituation to patterns of biblically and historically rooted practices nurtures maturity in congregations. Dykstra asserts that these practices cross regional, cultural, socio-economic, and ethnic boundaries. In 1985, he identified the following as the more significant practices of the community of faith:

> (1) telling the Christian story to one another; (2) interpreting together the meaning of that story for our life in the world; (3) worshiping God together: praising God and giving thanks for God's redemptive work in the world and for our lives together; (4) praying together; (5) listening and talking attentively to one another; (6) confessing to one another, and forgiving and reconciling with one another; (7)

tolerating one another's failures and encouraging one another; (8) giving one another away, letting go of one another, freeing each other for the work each must do and the life each must live; (9) performing faithful acts of service and witness; (10) suffering for and with other people; (11) providing hospitality and care, not only to one another but also (perhaps especially) to strangers; and (12) criticizing and resisting all those powers and patterns (both within the church and in the world as a whole) which destroy human beings and corrode human community. (Dykstra 1985, 197)[3]

He stressed the importance of involvement in these practices and growing in understanding of what they mean, and he argued that understanding of belief and the nature of one's spiritual journey is fostered as participation in the practices becomes more complex and varied (ibid., 199). Dykstra continues to stress that practices are not activities or duties. They are rather biblically derived patterns of action in Christian community through which God's grace, mercy, presence, and so on, can become known.[4] Diana Butler Bass (2006) offers that as congregations engage in 'religious practices' they are formed into deeper patterns of service. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass assert that practices become those things that congregations do over time to address human need in the light of God's active presence (Volf and Bass 2001).

Practicing Congregational Practices

We find it difficult to envision congregations in terms other than programs and services. We presume that these activities distinguish congregations from other organizations in society. Yet, it is not uncommon to meet people, Christian and non-Christian, who seem to find little in churches that sets them apart. Many today doubt the validity of religious institutions while, at the same time, they are searching for spiritual meaning. For many in society–and in congregations–the church does not have the kind of "persona" that even non-believers instinctively feel it should have. When the church fails to incarnate biblical and theological principles, it becomes incomprehensible, not only to the world, but also to ourselves.

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[3] See further elaboration in Dorothy Bass (1998), Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds (2001), Diana Butler Bass (2004, and Craig Dykstra (2005) among others.

[4] See http://www.practicingourfaith.org/prct_what_are_practices.html Last accessed June 30, 2008

Dykstra (2005) posed two questions that are at the heart of what it takes to embody practices in congregations. "What does it mean to live the Christian life faithfully and well? And how can we help one another to do so?" We have accepted as normative models of organization that often do little to help congregations become the people who demonstrate the character and behavior God expects. The notion that we have to ask different questions, allow time for character to develop, give priority to spiritual over institutional goals, seems idealistic in the extreme. Yet, understanding their identity and purpose as the people of God, and learning to live authentically in relation to that understanding, is a non-negotiable for congregations. Similarly, those who sincerely seek to exercise leadership *within* a congregation may, like Moses, come to realize that God does have a purpose for the church that is so much greater than what we typically envision as a successful congregation. At this point, a local congregation embraces renewal, or frustration and resistance bury the call to become the people of God, or a new church movement emerges.

For several years, I worked among congregations and theological schools in Canada. After one particularly difficult church board meeting, I wrote the following.

If Churches Were Parks

If we tore down our church buildings and replaced them with parks would the buildings be missed? If churches were parks, there would be trees and grass and places for pleasant walks, neighborhood families enjoying the changing seasons, and our "old ones" sitting on benches telling children stories of their lives and faith.

In the fall, as the leaves changed from green to yellow, orange and red, we could invite our friends and neighbors to corn roasts and BBQs; invite them to laugh with us, talk with us, and enjoy the beauty of God's creation--in the park. We could leave the children something wonderful in a world gone mad.

In the winter we could roll in the snow with the neighborhood children, throw snowballs, create snow sculptures, and grow to know each other again as we walked under trees heavy with hoar frost. At Christmas, we could string colored lights, decorate a Christmas tree, savor the story of the nativity and sing carols under quiet stars.

If churches were parks we would have to forsake our games of power and our dreams of empire for pleasant walks, snow forts, corn roasts, Christmas trees, carol sings, Easter pageants, and heart to heart

talks with those who need to know why we still believe in God. If our churches were parks, all people could gather there; they could come whenever they wished, for there would be no locked doors or security windows on our parks--no stained glass windows to hide behind. Members of the church eating lunch in the park could strike up a conversation with a business person, university student, or shopper resting before heading home . . . admire the multi-colors of a group of teenagers and ask them if they are afraid of the world we have created for them; or angry because of the future we may have taken away from them.

Of course, we would find pain in our parks. Lonely people, unhappy children, sullen youth. We might confront those trying to buy drugs in our parks. We might fear those who would hurt us and steal from us. If our churches were parks we would have to confront the world outside our buildings. We would have to be those who make peace and speak of redemption and hope rather than those who hide behind fortress walls and wish the world away.

When God started the world, He put His man and woman in a park. He chose to walk and talk with His creation in a park. When we were cast out of the park, we began to build towers, empires, cities and temples. We had to acquire and possess--not only the present, but the past and the future. We found ways to control our world and other persons. It's hard to do this in a park.

Admittedly, this short essay grew out of personal disappointment that the church as I knew it was not living up to the ideal that I had in mind. As I have grown older I am less naive about what can happen in congregations–the good and the bad. However, even as we recognize that organizational entropy is inevitable, we are obligated to shepherd wisely, which requires constant attention to what God demands of the church; to teach and lead faithfully, which requires that we be among, not apart from, the people of God; and to speak prophetically when necessary.

Congregational Practices and Theological Education

If the pre-eminent role of leaders is to assist congregations to understand and live authentically in relation to their identity and purpose as the people of God, the nature and purpose of theological education also has to be considered.

David Kelsey stresses that if theological education is irrevocably linked to the articulation and outworking of the practices of congregations, then the disciplines that inform learning experiences will be "mandated by the sorts of interests we have in

congregations" (Kelsey 1992, 230). He suggests that among these disciplines are those of the intellectual historian and textual critic ("to grasp what the congregation says it is responding *to* in its worship and why"), the cultural anthropologist, ethnographer, and philosopher ("to grasp how the congregation shapes its social space by its uses of scripture, by its uses of traditions of worship and patterns of education and mutual nurture, and by the 'logic' of its discourse"), and the sociologist and social historian ("to grasp how the congregation's location in its host society and culture helps shape concretely its distinctive construal of the Christian thing" (ibid., 230–31).

Tasks appropriate to theological education, then, are to uphold the quality of congregational practices, examine them against the long history of the church, and situate them in societies and cultures. Orienting theological education to the practices of congregations would seem more defensible than orienting it to some grand intellectual project. When we identify the practices of congregations with the theological quest to know God truly, matters of faith (theory) and practices are seen as one whole; both theology and the social sciences are mandated; inconsistency between belief and behavior is addressed in a prophetic voice; and concerns about organizational patterns and leadership style are not permitted to devolve to a pragmatic concern for what works.

Dykstra suggests that seminaries need to see themselves as part of a larger whole—larger than denominations and larger than the world of higher education. He identifies this larger whole as the "practice of Christian theological education" and names three fundamental elements of this broad practice: the academic study of theology, the education of the church and public in Christian faith and practice, and the equipping of church leadership. "What is important to notice in all this is that it is the *practices* that are perennial. They are institutionalized in different ways in different times and places—and the particular institutionalizations may come and go, or be transformed by taking on new practices. But whatever happens with particular institutions, the practices seem to endure—*because they are essential to the very existence of Christian faith!*" (Dykstra 1991, 101, emphasis added). This understanding of practice is promising in that it frees us from identifying theological education with a particular institutional form (e.g., seminary or church).

One can hope that the concept of theological education for the whole people of God will be strengthened in coming years. Dykstra, among others, believes that

seminaries are essential "for the perpetuation, enhancement, and enlargement of the practice of Christian theological education in our society." However, he insists that the education of clergy would be "more powerful and empowering were it to take more seriously the hunger and need for a theological education of the church and the public." The academic study of theology would be "enlarged and deepened as its practice is placed in the larger context of the actual public practice of faith" (ibid., 104).

God said, "I will build my church." May we not hinder what God envisions by seeking to build it ourselves. May we not be so preoccupied with building institutions and empires that we lose sight of the reality that God alone has the purpose for the people of God.

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Building a Healthy Congregational Culture in Today's Postmodern World
By Peter T. Cha

Abstract. In the United States and in many other parts of the world, a major socio-cultural shift is taking place as they transition from modernity to postmodernity. As the landscape of their mission field is radically changing, churches in these settings are exploring different ways to address new opportunities and challenges these changes bring, ranging from developing new worship styles to re-conceptualizing theology. This article will explore an aspect of the church life, one that is less visible and are often overlooked, that nonetheless calls for a serious attention from today's church leaders as the church strives to carry out its mission effectively in today's postmodern world.

Explicit and Implicit Theologies

Recently, a growing number of theologians and sociologists in the U. S. have been paying attention to the study of congregations, studying how they function and carry out their missions in today's society. One of the findings of their studies is that each congregation has two forms of theology – explicit theology and implicit theology – that guide and shape their corporate ministries as well as their individual members' spiritual lives (Schreiter, 30-32). Explicit theology, on the one hand, is a theology that is proclaimed from the pulpit, taught in Sunday school classes and stated on the church's website as its statement of faith. In short, this is what the church confesses and proclaims as its shared beliefs. Implicit theology, on the other hand, is what the congregational leaders and members do when they gather together. It includes, among other things, how they make their decisions and communicates them, how they allocate the church resources, how they worship and fellowship, and how different groups of people are valued or are marginalized. Implicit theology is thus formed and sustained by various – intentional and unintentional – practices of the congregation.

Furthermore, these studies point out that congregations and their individual members grow spiritually in an optimal manner when their explicit and implicit theologies are congruent with one another. On the whole, however, congregations seem

to fail to experience such an agreement and harmony between their two operating theologies. And, when these two theologies are at odds with one another, it is implicit theology, not explicit theology, that exerts a greater influence in shaping the spiritual formation of the congregation and its members. For pastors, theologians and other church leaders who are concerned about the spiritual growth of God's church, then, these empirical findings call for our attention to the critical importance of this category called implicit theology, to the significance of embodying and living out the truth of the Bible in the corporate life of the church.

Postmodernity and Its Challenges

If implicit theology is critical to the church and pastoral theology in all settings, it is especially true in today's postmodern setting. During the 1960's, a noted evangelist named Paul Little traveled hundreds of college campuses as the director of evangelism for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Based on his campus evangelism experiences, Dr. Little wrote a number of best-selling books on evangelism, books such as *How to Give Away Your Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 1966) and *Know Why You Believe* (InterVarsity Press, 1968). In these widely read books, Dr. Little identified and responded to a number of key questions that non-Christian college students asked about Christianity. The following are some of the most often asked questions that emerged during the 1960's:

- Is Christianity rational?
- Is there a God?
- Is Christ God? Is he the only way to God?
- Did Christ rise from the dead?
- Isn't Christian experience only psychological?
- Are the Bible documents reliable? Isn't it full of errors?
- How can miracles be possible?
- Do science and Scripture agree?
- Why does God allow suffering and evil?
- What about the heathen? Will God condemn them to hell when they did not have an opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel?

Then, in 2000, today's director of evangelism or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Dr. Rick Richardson, published another significant book on evangelism, *Evangelism Outside the Box* (InterVarsity Press, 2000). Like his predecessor Dr. Little, Dr. Richardson, too, traveled to hundreds of campuses in the U. S., engaging non-

Christian students with the Gospel during the past 20 years. In his book, Dr. Richardson too highlighted some questions that today's postmodern students have about Christianity. The following are some of the questions today's students are voicing:

- Questions of power and motive: *Why are Christians imposing their beliefs and morality on "others"?*

- Questions of identity: *How can you Christians think you can tell other people who they are?*

- Questions of hierarchy: *Doesn't the church legitimate certain hierarchical structures in our culture and society (e.g., gender, racial, educational etc.)?*

- Questions of pain and suffering: *Why do I hurt? Why did my family break apart? Why is there so much hatred and violence in our community, in the world?*

- Questions of trust: *Why should I trust you? How can I trust the church that has done terrible things in the name of Christ?*

- Questions of authenticity and character: *What about different forms of hypocrisy in the church?*

- Questions of interpretation: *Isn't the way you read a text and the way you see the world completely dependent on which community (culture) you belong to?*

- Questions of relevance: *Does your belief transform lives? Does it make any difference?*

- Questions of social impact: *Does your religion help society, particularly those who are marginalized? Or, are you just another self-serving group?*

- Questions of ecological environment: *Didn't Christianity cause the ecological crisis?*

Even a casual glance of these two sets of questions indicates that they are quite different from one another in their focus and nature. The first set of questions, those that emerged from the *modern* context of 1960's, focus more on doctrinal and theological issues while the second set of questions, those that emerged from today's *postmodern* campus settings, focus more on various practices and relational/institutional issues. The difference between these two sets of questions, then, points to some of the broader cultural shifts that had taken place as a society went from modernity to postmodernity. While a modern culture and society might have placed a good deal of emphasis on the

pursuit of rational knowledge and truth, a postmodern culture is concerned more about subjective experiences and the multiplicity of perspectives. While the former is focusing on the individual's concern about one's salvation, the latter is focusing on the broader social dimension of human experiences and conditions. Finally, while the former set of questions reflect the seekers' desire to attain an understanding of a given phenomenon, the latter set of questions reflect a certain degree of suspicion, revealing what postmodern scholars call the "hermeneutics of suspicion."

So, what do these changes mean for today's church, especially if it were to be effective in reaching out to today's younger, postmodern generations? Given the focus of this article, one way to summarize the shift in above two sets of questions is that the first set of questions are concerned primarily with the explicit theology of the church while the second one addresses the implicit theology. Now, Dr. Richardson points out that today's non-Christian young people want to eventually address some of the questions from the first set, but only after the second set of questions had been addressed satisfactorily. Therefore, while the clear articulation of Biblically-based explicit theology will continue to be an important task of the church in the postmodern era, especially in light of the emerging challenges coming from the radical forms of relativism and reader-centered hermeneutics, the church must also be very attentive in developing an implicit theology that is consistent with its explicit theology, consistent with the comprehensive teachings of God's Word.

Towards Constructing a Biblical Implicit Theology

If the task of developing a healthy, Biblical implicit theology is especially critical in today's postmodern world, what are some resources that might be helpful to today's pastors? Unfortunately, this particular area of practical theology has been greatly neglected thus far. In most Master of Divinity program curriculum of today's seminaries, for instance, a vast majority of the courses that aim to prepare future pastors are focusing on some aspects of explicit theology, teaching students various contents of an explicit theology (e.g., Biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology etc.) and training them how to proclaim such a theology (e.g., preaching courses, Christian Education etc.). Currently, a very few seminary courses are offered to help the future

pastors to think Biblically about the task of creating an implicit theology that would enhance one's pastoral ministry in congregational settings.

While there may be a lack of resources in the area of implicit theology per se, there is a growing literature in the area of organizational culture and congregational culture. In many ways, a significant way to address the issue of implicit theology is to be attentive to the congregation's culture. Each congregation has its own unique organizational culture. The question is, "Is my church's congregational culture based on Biblical principles and values, thus reinforcing the Biblical truths proclaimed in its explicit theology or is it shaped more by secular culture from outside, thus undermining the explicit theology that is weekly proclaimed and taught?"

Understanding the Nature and Significance of a Congregational Culture

What then is a congregational culture and what are some ways the church leaders can promote positive changes in its culture? In *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 1992), Edgar Schein, a noted scholar who teaches at MIT, proposed that each organizational culture has the following three distinguishable levels: artifacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions. The artifacts level refers to those cultural elements that are most visible: certain symbols, practices, and aesthetics that are unique to that organization. For a congregation, this artifacts level of culture includes of its particular worship style and elements, the architectural features of the church building, the food shared at its fellowship gatherings, the organizational structure, etc. The second level, the level of espoused values, refers to the church's practiced values, which often can be different from those that are articulated as the church's core values. In the day-to-day life of the church, what type of activities and ministries are particularly valued by the majority of the congregation? What types of gifts/skills are particularly appreciated and why? And who are some individuals or groups of individuals who are lifted up as "heroes" of the church and who are neglected, intentionally or unintentionally? Finally, the third level, the least visible and yet perhaps most consequential, is the level of "basic underlying assumptions." What are some shared understandings that the congregational leaders and members have regarding the identity of the church as well as the way the church functions? Often these underlying assumptions are not explicitly stated in the church documents or websites; nonetheless, they powerfully inform and shape the

congregation's self-understanding of who they are and "how things get done around here." These three levels of the congregational culture, I would propose, play a vital role in the shaping, sustaining and transforming of the implicit theology of the church.

Analyzing and Evaluating a Congregational Culture

When a pastor begins one's ministry in a new church, one of the significant responsibilities that pastor needs to perform is to become familiar with one's new congregation. This process would, of course, involve the step of getting to know church leaders and members. However, this process of orientation should also involve the intentional study and analysis of the culture of the congregation. Using the above-mentioned levels as a framework, the pastor can utilize the methods such as personal, on-going observations, informal interviews with various individuals in the church, and the document analysis (i.e., studying the past church bulletins, annual meeting documents, church website etc.) to study the over-all culture of the congregation.[1] This task of carefully studying one's congregational culture might call for a sizeable time investment at the beginning of one's pastoral ministry; however, the benefits and dividends, I would argue, will greatly outweigh the cost involved.

Once various aspects and contours of the congregational culture has been determined, it should be followed by the step of the critical evaluation of that culture, identifying those elements that are Biblically supportable and are healthy and those that are producing opposite results. How do some of the congregation's practices, norms, values and shared assumptions measure up to the teachings of the Bible? Do they reinforce or undermine the Biblical principles, thus the church's explicit theology? During my graduate school years, I had an opportunity to study a number of Korean immigrant churches, focusing particularly on their congregational cultures. On the whole, these churches articulated an explicit theology that is very Biblically based and theologically orthodox; however, many aspects of their congregational cultures, of their implicit theology, failed to uphold and reinforce their explicit theology. In many ways, immigrant churches are more susceptible to the temptation to appropriate uncritically various ethnic cultural elements into the church life since their primary functions include

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[1] *Studying Congregation: A New Handbook* (Abingdon Press, 1998) offers many fine suggestions and tools for those who aim to study a congregational culture.

the preservation of the ethnic culture and the transmission of ethnic culture to the second-generation young people. Often, tragically, second-generation young people see the growing gap between the church's explicit and implicit theologies and conclude that their churches are guilty of the sin of hypocrisy, many choosing to leave the church in which they grew up. While immigrant churches might have more complex relationship with its surrounding culture, the danger of uncritical appropriation of the outside culture is something every church faces and with which must wrestle.

Initiating the Change, Employing the Explicit Theology

So how does a pastor initiate the process of transforming a congregational culture once the task of the critical evaluation is done? Edgar Schein noted in his book that in order to change the organizational culture, a leader needs to intentionally and thoughtfully introduce some meaningful changes, beginning with the first two levels of its culture. In doing so, Schein warns, the leader must anticipate some resistance to such a change and proceed with caution since people tend to desire to hold on to those values and practices that are familiar to them.

In initiating the change in congregational culture, pastors should not underestimate the power and authority of the pulpit. That is, while the aim is to change the implicit theology (i.e., the congregational culture) of the church, pastors may need to employ some aspects of the church's explicit theology to promote these changes. For instance, a well-known pastor in America once observed that there are two types of congregations: one that resembles an *art museum* where people come to display various achievements they made and another that resembles a *hospital*, a place where hurting people come to humbly receive healing from the Master Physician. What he is contrasting here is not so much two different types of explicit theologies but of implicit theologies. However, if a pastor, recognizing that his congregation fits the museum model and would like to guide it to become more like a hospital, he needs to explain to congregation Biblically and theologically why such a change is desirable. The Biblical and theological support for a new picture and imagination of the church, an intentional articulation of new explicit theology, is a very critical step that would ensure the very success of the whole transformation.

An important Biblical illustration of this principle is found in Matthew 5-7, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus began his public ministry, as he began to gather his disciples to form a new community of his followers, Jesus used this sermon – that is, an explicit theology – to provide a new blue print for the radically different kind of community, the Kingdom community. In this sermon, Jesus outlined a set of new values that would shape the mind and heart of his followers and their relationships with one another, the values that are radically countercultural. Although his disciples failed to grasp and embrace these Kingdom values and practices early on, it is clear that these teachings had significant impact on the formation of implicit theology of the early church in the Book of Acts. In the end, the Gospel of Jesus Christ had a powerful impact on Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the corners of the Mediterranean world not simply because of the powerful preaching of Peter, Paul and other apostles but also because of the way the early church had embodied the teachings of Jesus, enabling it to live out the Gospel through its implicit theology that beautifully matched its explicit theology.[2]

Introducing New Values and Practices: the Case Study of Asian American Churches

In addition to employing the teaching and preaching opportunities to implement changes, pastors and other church leaders can also affect changes by introducing and institutionalizing a new set of values to the congregational life, values that are Biblically-rooted and Kingdom-based. Between 2002 and 2004, fifteen Asian American pastors and theologians gathered in California annually to discuss the question, "How would Asian American churches grow as healthy congregations?" In this gathering, pastors from eight growing Asian American churches were invited to share some of the ways they are experiencing a healthy organizational and spiritual growth. As they presented their stories, a set of the following common values emerged:

- becoming a grace-filled congregation that effectively address the shame and guilt
- becoming a congregations that is truth-embodying, not just truth-proclaiming
- valuing healthy leadership, for healthy pastors promote healthy congregations
- becoming open to transformation and change even when they are costly

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[2]In his book *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper Collins, 1997), sociologist Rodney Stark documents how the early Christian churches of the first and second century AD powerfully impacted the Greco-Roman world with its countercultural Kingdom values and practices.

- practicing evangelism as an expression of hospitality
- valuing healthy intergenerational relationships based on mutual trust
- valuing healthy gender relationships based on mutual respect
- promoting a deep commitment to the ministry of mercy and justice in meeting various needs of the surrounding communities.[3]

These values, as inspiring and attractive as they may seem, are merely empty statements if they are not practiced by congregations. Therefore, during these consultation gatherings, much attention was also given to the ways different congregations chose to practice these values, the way they created new artifacts of certain practices and rituals to promote and strengthen these values. For instance, one Korean immigrant church intentionally sends out its short-term mission team that consists of both Korean-speaking first-generation immigrants as well as English-speaking second-generation young people. While these joint ventures encounter many additional challenges that come from language and cultural differences between the two groups, at the end of the mission project they return home having encountered a powerful experience of reconciliation, healing and partnership. In fact, this intentional practice plays a key role in creating a new congregational culture that promotes intergenerational and cross-cultural partnership between the two generations, the very area in which most immigrant churches greatly struggle.

The collective experiences of these eight Asian American churches clearly demonstrate that, among other things, those churches that practice Biblical and healthy values attract a growing number of postmodern Asian American young people. Given the prevailing ethos and conditions of postmodernity that promote authenticity and inherent suspicion towards all forms of institution, churches in all settings must be very intentional in seeking to narrow the gap between the proclaimed and practiced theologies, between the explicit and implicit theologies. For, in doing so, the church would be able to function as an effective witnessing community in today's postmodern world, and perhaps more importantly, the church would bring glory to God by enabling the world to see clearly its practiced good deeds (Matthew 5:16).

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[3] These values became important themes in the following book that emerged from these annual consultation gatherings: *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches* (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

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The Transformation of Community and Individual in an Evangelical Rite of Passage

By Ted Kautzmann

Abstract. A church in Latin America has been revitalized since it started holding retreats regularly. An ethnographic study of the retreats found that they fit well into the framework of initiatory rites as described in some theories of ritual. These theories suggest the retreats are effective in transforming conferees because as liminal situations, they open conferees to personal self evaluation, engage them in ritual acts, and change their status into a people who have encountered God. The community is in turn revitalized as the bonds of community are deepened, symbols from the retreats are invoked in regular worship, and the individual's transformation reinforces the community's core convictions.

Our Redeemer Church[1], located in a lower middle class neighborhood of a Latin American city, has undergone a transformation since last year, when it began holding frequent weekend retreats. Since then the commitment of many of its people has dramatically increased and the level of enthusiasm and attendance have risen remarkably. Similar retreats, known as "encounters", are being offered by a growing number of churches in Latin America. Aimed at non-believers and immature Christians, the encounters are designed to be attended only once in a lifetime. Though Our Redeemer Church is historically Baptist and continues to practice baptism, the encounters have essentially replaced baptism in this church as the critical initiatory rite. The retreats are held every two to three months, even though each one requires a large staff, hundreds of hours of preparation, and a considerable budget. Much of the energy of the church has now been redirected toward offering them. Although it is impossible to say if this level of investment is sustainable, leaders believe the church has been revitalized not only through changes in the lives of the conferees, but through the commitment the church as a community has made to holding the encounters. This article proposes that theories of ritual, specifically Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage and Victor Turner's

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[1] The name is fictitious, though the church is real.

concepts of liminality, communitas, and flow, provide useful frameworks for understanding the impact of encounters on this community of believers.[2]

Observing an Encounter

A colleague[3] and I attended an encounter in the spring of 2008 as participant observers. In the weeks leading up to the encounter, the pastor, whom I had known for years, would tell us very little about it. We and the other conferees would find out when we got there. Like the others, we had heard reports of lives profoundly changed at these retreats. Just about everybody who had gone to one, which included nearly the entire church, urged others to attend. Expectations were high among the conferees. We were told very little about what would occur or even where we would go. We were to pack lightly and meet at the church parking lot Friday afternoon and return Sunday evening.

Conferees and Staff

A half hour bus ride brought us to a simple Catholic retreat center. We were ushered directly to a conference room and told to be seated in the folding chairs facing a platform. The pastor of the church welcomed us and reviewed the rules. When any of us needed anything during plenary sessions, we were to raise our hands and a personal guide would wait on us at our seat. We were not to have a cell phone or wear a watch.

He also introduced the staff, all of whom had been conferees in the past. They included kitchen workers, sound and computer operators, and personal guides. There was as many staff as conferees, about 30 of each. All staff members, unlike us conferees, wore T shirts of the same color, printed with the name and motto of the church. The pastor introduced many of the staff by name, though the conferees were not. In fact, the conferees were never formally introduced during the retreat. Pains were taken to treat all conferees alike, regardless of church experience or other personal history. None of us was assumed to be a Christian, though we were all given first class treatment.

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[2] The use of anthropological theories to explain some of the effects of the retreats is not meant to imply that they are not a work of God. This article assumes that God often works within the recurring patterns of human culture.

[3] The colleague, Enrique Fernández, wrote a doctoral dissertation on ritual among Protestants in Guatemala (2004).

Learning Content and Activities

Most of the weekend was taken up by sessions of teaching followed by related learning activities. The teaching was richly illustrated, often with symbols, and sometimes with drama. Messages covered spiritual issues, such as sin and God's forgiveness. They also covered personal problems, including rejection by others, forgiving others, and self esteem. Freedom was a prominent theme running through most of the messages and other activities. In many different ways we learned about and celebrated our liberty from sin, guilt, demons, resentment and so on. A message, usually in monologue style, would last for about 40 minutes, followed by one or more learning activities. Sometimes this involved conferees writing a letter to someone or making a list, for example, of people who had rejected them. The guides brought paper, pens, and tablets to each conferee at the designated moment. Plenty of time was allotted for these exercises. When conferees shed tears, not an uncommon occurrence, guides would quickly appear at their sides with Kleenex and linger to pat them gently on the shoulder.

Many of the activities were elaborate. A message on the importance of forgiving others was followed by a set of activities. First, each conferee was given a half sheet of paper and asked to write the names of people who had wounded them—people they needed to forgive. Then 15 members of the staff stood in the front of the room, each holding a sign bearing the name of a type of relationship such as wife, husband, mother, father, boss, neighbor, and so on. Conferees were asked to go forward, embrace the staff who represented the names they had just written on the papers, and tell them they were forgiven. Quietly they went forward and gave long, tearful hugs to the surrogate offenders. They murmured forgiveness and acceptance into one another's ears. Most participants seemed deeply moved. In later interviews, many conferees reported feeling liberated from old wounds and said they now felt no animosity toward those who had wronged them. Several of the staff, all of whom had been through this exercise as conferees in the past, concurred and said that their old animosities had never returned. The change for them was permanent. In the cultural context, interpersonal offenses are often devastating and long lasting. Reconciliation is very difficult for both parties. Many people carry deep personal wounds their whole lives even after hearing sermons on the need to forgive. These exercises, at least in this encounter setting, seem to be an exceptionally powerful learning experience. Informants reported similarly genuine life

changes as a result of several other sessions as well, all of which involved highly structured learning activities. We engaged in more than twenty different activities of this sort over the weekend.

Group singing was also a frequent activity. Songs related directly to the theme of freedom in Christ or to other sub themes treated in the messages. The music was loud and energetic. Songs were generally new to the conferees, but were quickly learned. Often the song leaders would be joined in front of the room by a dozen of the staff, who would face the conferees and sing, clap, and dance or jump to the music. By mid morning on Saturday, the staff began using hand gestures to invite the conferees to join them up front in the dancing.

Climax and Conclusion

The encounter's emotional climax, the *ministración*, came on Saturday night after a lecture on spiritual warfare. Chairs were moved aside and the staff anointed and prayed over conferees, causing most to be 'slain in the Spirit.' Staff cast demons out of several. Moans and tears were abundant. After about 45 minutes, the slow, soft background music swiftly became loud and energetic. Staff and conferees joined in jubilant dancing and singing songs about freedom. Several of the women fell on the floor and shook all over. A few others seemed to be dancing in a trance, unaware of others. Meanwhile, someone brought in a piñata, which was broken by conferees and balloons were released to be popped with our feet. We were handed whistles to blow. The singing, dancing, jumping, popping, whistling, and shaking occurred all at once. The roles of staff and conferees merged into one, wild celebration.

Later that evening we were treated to a fancy banquet; then gathered to give testimonies seated around a hundred candles arranged on the floor in a huge heart shape. Most conferees spoke of their certainty that God had brought them to this retreat.

Sunday morning we were all given blue T-shirts to wear under an old shirt of our own. As the encounter neared its end, the conferees were told to remove their old shirts as symbols of their old selves and throw them on the floor. In the singing and dancing that followed many stomped gleefully on the old shirts. The pastor warned that we were about to reenter the world as totally changed people. Our families and friends would not understand. It was up to us to testify to them what God had done in our lives, but we must

not tell anyone the specific activities of the retreat so that others will be open to attending and would be as surprised by it as we were.

Finally, we boarded the bus and returned to town. We pulled up at a community center packed with people for our reception. Conferees entered a dark tunnel about 25 feet long, formed by two lines of tightly packed church members who joined hands above their heads. We emerged from the tunnel into a large room full of church members wearing the encounter T-shirts, singing and dancing to the encounter songs of freedom in a repeat of the jubilant celebration of Saturday night. After a few songs the pastor took a microphone and introduced the conferees one at a time by name. Some gave testimonies of what they considered dramatic personal change. For each conferee, the pastor called their families to come forward to welcome them. Most of the families were not Christian, but as a surprise to the conferees, they had been brought to the reception by staff for the purpose of celebrating this climactic moment in our lives. Everyone received words and hugs of congratulation.

Transformation in Rites of Passage

Theories of ritual from the field of anthropology may explain, at least in part, the transformation of individual conferees and of the congregation itself. Belgian folklorist, Arnold van Gennep (1960), used the phrase *rites de passage* to refer to rituals that accompany life transitions from one state or position to another (e.g., baptisms, graduations, weddings, and funerals). He held that all rites of passage have three phases: separation, margin or *limen*, and aggregation (1967, 94). First the person or group is ritually separated from their original status or condition. They then enter a "liminal" period, in which their status or condition is vague or ambiguous and they seem to have no clear place in society. Finally, in the aggregation phase, conferees are ritually brought back into society where they occupy a new status or exist in a new condition (Ibid., 94).

For Victor Turner, the liminal stage tends to be well developed, especially in rites of initiation which are rituals of entry into a new status—for example into adulthood, political office, or a religious group (1967, 95). Turner observed that such rites are often secretive and have a timeless quality (1967, 103; 1972, 399). Initiates in the liminal phase are set apart and in an undefined state. They have no status, authority or even identity that would differentiate them from other initiates (1967, 98-99). One thinks of a class of

graduates, for example, or baptismal candidates all dressed alike, to the point of making it difficult to distinguish gender (1969, 102-103). In Turner's analysis, instruction given to the initiates in this period is often rich with symbols and usually presents the core beliefs and cosmology of the group (1967, 103).

Transformation of the Person

The encounters of the Our Redeemer Church display many of the characteristics of rites of initiation. The initiates are separated from their normal environment and enter a liminal state where their distinctive personal attributes and even their individual identities disappear from view. The encounters have a timeless feel, since watches are prohibited, no clocks are in view, no schedule or program is ever explained, and most activities simply begin without any previous mention. My colleague commented at one point that time had seemed to stand still. We were in an eternal present.

As Turner observed in other rites of initiation (1967, 103), the instruction at the encounter is rich with symbols, many illustrating the core beliefs of the church. Many of the learning activities can be considered rituals, involving the performance of prescribed, symbolic acts.[4]

The aggregation phase is also evident in these retreats. Conferees return wearing the church T-shirt, a symbol of their new status as members of the community. The festive reception, the effusive congratulations, and the triumphant testimonies all speak of the achievement of a new status. Even the dark tunnel from which conferees emerge is reminiscent of tunnels observed by Turner in initiatory rites (1967, 99).

But more than a change of status seems to occur in rites of initiation. According to Maurice Bloch (1992) and others, ritual transforms the participants themselves because in ritual they can come into close contact with God, or a transcendent power (Davies 2002, 137-38; Albrecht 1992, 124-25). Douglas Davies notes that church retreats can be liminal situations with exceptional "educative power" because of the "strong sense of power and truth" in such contexts (2002, 127). It was emphasized often at the encounter that the conferees would meet God there and that he himself welcomed them to the event. The

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[4] No academic consensus has been reached on the definition of ritual. For the sake of simplicity, I use the term here in a traditional, anthropological sense of the performance of repeated, intentional, formalized acts, though in this case not necessarily traditional (Grimes 2007, 66-67).

sense of encounter with God was especially powerful in the Saturday night *ministración*, with its supernatural manifestations. The central theme of the retreat was liberation, with the *ministración* as the climactic event where God himself liberated them from the most powerful bondage of all, demon possession. Conferees reported that they were transformed because at the encounter they came into contact with God himself, who had changed them.

Liminal situations often make people more open to personal self evaluation (Molina 1997, 45). Daniel Albrecht holds that liminality in Pentecostal rites creates openness and deep receptivity to God (Albrecht 1992, 124-25). Certainly, self evaluation and confession were essential ingredients in many of the rituals performed by conferees at the encounter. Serious personal evaluation is evident in the testimonies during and after the retreat which included confession and rejection of sin that was present in life before the retreat.

Rituals during the retreat also seemed to play a role in the conferees' transformation simply because they represented an effective form of participatory and experiential learning (Scott 2007, 2). Teaching on sin, grace, forgiving others, and spiritual liberation were the subjects of a wide variety of reinforcing rituals. Conferees not only heard instruction on each topic and saw physical illustrations; they spoke it, sang it, wrote it, read it, celebrated it, and acted it out. The encounters should be mined for further insight into the power of ritual in Christian education.

Transformation of the Community

While the encounters are designed for individual conferees, the church itself has benefited remarkably since they began. Nearly all the attendees of the church have been to an encounter and no person feels the need to attend twice. Yet, it seems that the leaders believe the church will "cool off" if they do not continue to hold them at least every two or three months. Clearly they assume that the revitalization of the church consists of more than the sum of the individual transformations of its members. Anthropologists since Turner have held that the power of rites of passage goes well beyond the individual to the group itself (Turner 1972; Molina 1997, 42). If so, in what ways do these rites of passage transform or reinforce the community?

Communal Bonds

Victor Turner theorized that rites of passage reinforce the social structure of a group. He held that the liminal period produced "communitas", immediate personal interrelatedness unstructured by rank or status (Turner 1969, 96). People who ordinarily relate strictly within hierarchical roles, such as boss and subordinate, may, in a liminal situation, experience a close familial bond. Davies notes that communitas is close to the biblical term *koinonia* (Davies 2002, 126). Without social identifiers, social structure is suspended in the group—a state Turner called "antistructure" (1969, 102). Social structure is instrumentally necessary. But antistructure, argued Turner, reminds participants of their common humanity and equivalent relation to reality. The two exist in a dialectical relationship in which antistructure, experienced periodically, reorients structure to reality (1969, 97, 177-78). At the encounter, the conferees and staff experienced communitas, especially at the climactic Saturday night celebration and later at the reception. Further fieldwork should explore the possibility that the encounters reorient relations within the church to "ultimate reality", in other words, that they help church members to relate primarily in *koinonia* and only secondarily within the structural roles of church organization. Church members have reported a strong sense of communion in the church since the encounters began.

Flow and Excitement from Contact with Divine

Liminality and communitas can also create "flow", according to Turner. Occurring sometimes in ritual as well as in playing games and in drama performance, flow is "a state in which action follows action according to an inner logic" (Turner 1979, 486-87). One is totally occupied with the role one plays within the limited field of rules. "Action and awareness are experienced as one" and the sense of self is lost. Flow is its own reward. To flow is to "be as happy as a human being can be" (Turner 1979, 488). Davies sees charismatic activity as a collective experience of flow where participants are energized by one another's activity, which lends the entire event a sense of power and excitement. (Davies 2002, 132-36). The dancing and jumping at the retreat, especially during the climactic event, appear to be a perfect example of flow. When asked how they knew whether an encounter was successful, staff replied that if conferees entered into the dancing and jumping with abandon, especially at the climactic event, the encounter was a

success. If they held back, it was not. Flow may be the primary measure of success at the encounters.

Turner held that symbols and rituals produced in liminality can be invoked at a later point to reproduce communitas (Turner 1972, 391; Nichols 1985, 404-405). Regular Sunday church services at Our Redeemer Church are reportedly more exciting now. Once they attend an encounter, many young people spontaneously go to the front during Sunday worship to jump and dance during congregational singing. The flow experienced at encounters may be invoked by the music in worship, which reignites the flow (See Figure 1). This would explain some of the new excitement of the church community.
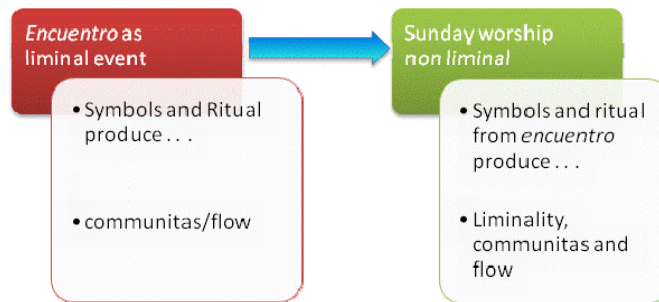
Figure 1. Flow occurring in the *encounter*

Mutual Reinforcement of Convictions

The encounters may be reinforcing in a new way the beliefs and world view of the church. Rites of intensification are rituals that strengthen or maintain the group's beliefs or commitments. The Eucharist or Lord's Supper has been called a rite of intensification. Davies notes that even a rite of passage, such as baptism, can function as a right of initiation for some members of a group and at the same time as a rite of intensification for other members (Davies 2002, 139-140). For the staff that is present throughout the encounter and for church members who attend the reception, the rite of passage of the conferees may intensify or reinforce the beliefs of the whole church. In this rite, the members see, hear, and participate again in the rituals of passage, albeit in somewhat different roles.

At Our Redeemer Church, there appears to be a cycle of reinforcement of the core beliefs (see figure 2).[5] The community is convinced that the encounters, with their teachings and experiences, will totally transform the lives of conferees. This conviction lends an air of great expectancy at the retreats which may contribute greatly to their success. When the conferees return and give testimonies affirming the teachings and displaying transformation, it reinforces the conviction of the church that the encounters will transform and that the teachings and experiences are from God.
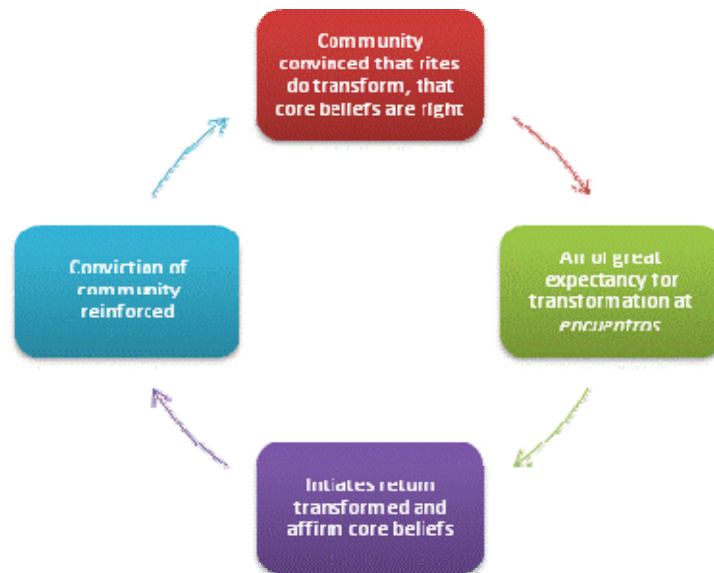
Figure 2. Cycle of Reinforcement

Since the church began the retreats, a reordering may have occurred among the church's core beliefs. The teachings that are most emphasized in the retreat probably have become the most important in the community. Perhaps chief among them is the belief that the most critical experience in their entire lives was their own attendance at the encounter as conferees. In the view of many informants, including older church members, the encounter was their most pivotal life moment or at least one of the most important.

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[5] Pedro Molina, following Turner and Pierre Boardieu, suggests that a cycle occurs involving the community's conviction and the performance of the rites. The effectiveness of the rites depends upon the conviction of the community that they will actually work in the lives of initiates. In turn, the performance of those rites legitimizes and institutionalizes the community's conviction (1997, 46, 50-54). He is referring primarily to the community's social structure. However, in the case of the *encounters* of the Our Redeemer Church, there appears to be a cycle of reinforcement of the core beliefs.

They were met by God and transformed. Every new encounter brings testimonial evidence that members of this community are the encountered ones. The self conception of the community may thus have shifted. If so, the encounters have established a new core belief. Now they reinforce it in a cycle of expectation and fulfillment.

Conclusion

Encounters fit remarkably well into the framework of initiatory rites as described in some theories of ritual. These theories suggest plausible explanations for the transformative power of the encounters in both individuals and communities. Such explanations can shed light on other forms of ritual, worship, and liminality. Liminal contexts are not limited to rites of initiation. They can also have less elaborate and intensive forms in shorter worship and educational experiences, (Davies 2002). Liminality can be created to the extent that a sense of timelessness and withdrawal from the ordinary world can be created (Nichols 1984, 405). Ritual can be effective even when it is not part of a group's past tradition (Grimes 2007, 117-19; Frankiel 2001, 77), though the liminal space necessary for transformation may require special measures to "contain" that space and set it off from ordinary life (Moore 1984, 94).

This study has not been presented to encourage adoption of the encounter itself in other Christian communities. The goal rather has been to stimulate reflection on the potential of rituals and liminal situations to transform communities.

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Educación bancaria vs. formación integral
By Roberto Kasper

La educación teológica tradicionalmente ha sido de tipo bancario, centrada en la transmisión del maestro a los alumnos de información que estos deben memorizar. Por cierto, la verdad bíblica se debe transmitir, pero la metodología bancaria no es la mejor para hacerlo. En vez de desarrollar un espíritu de humildad y servicio, perpetúa estructuras de poder, pues el graduado resulta creyendo que tiene la autoridad para mandar en la iglesia. Los acercamientos de Freire y Dewey aportan conceptos valiosos para una mejor educación, pero su concepto de la verdad es inaceptable, y no toman en cuenta el papel clave del carácter cristiano. Una mejor opción es "formación integral", una formación práctica para el ministerio que toma en cuenta la totalidad de la persona, incluyendo el ser, el saber y el hacer, e integra estos tres elementos en cada materia.

Palabras clave: educación, bancaria, formación, integral, Freire, Dewey, pragmatismo.

Theological education traditionally has concentrated on the transmission from teacher to students of information that they should memorize. True, biblical truth should be transmitted, but traditional methodology is not the best for doing so. Instead of developing a spirit of humility and service, it perpetuates power structures, for the graduate ends up believing that he has the authority to rule the church. The approaches of Freire and Dewey contribute valuable concepts for a better education, but their concept of the truth is unacceptable, and they do not take into account the key role of Christian character. A better option is "holistic formation", practical training for ministry that takes into account the whole person, including being, knowing and doing, and integrates these three elements in every course.

Key words: education, banking, formation, holistic, Freire, Dewey, pragmatism.

INTRODUCCIÓN

La cuestión de cuál es la mejor manera de educar a los creyentes es una que debería ser considerada por todo cristiano involucrado en discipular y capacitar a otros. La enseñanza es una de las tareas más importante de la iglesia. Cristo, en la Gran Comisión de Mateo 28:18-20, explicó que la manera de hacer discípulos era a través del bautismo y la enseñanza. El único verbo en el imperativo es "haced discípulos", mientras que "bautizando" y "enseñando", correctamente traducidos como gerundios, dan una

explicación de cómo hacerlo. Entonces, la educación resulta siendo uno de los medios principales para difundir el evangelio y edificar a la iglesia de Cristo.

Sin embargo, la manera de educar no es un tema que los líderes en las iglesias (y aun los seminarios) consideran con mucha frecuencia. El hecho de haber recibido una educación les deja con la falsa idea de que conocen lo suficiente de qué es educación. Aunque el proceso de discipular a las naciones debe incluir la enseñanza y aprendizaje (tomando en cuenta los papeles complementarios del maestro y el discípulo/estudiante), los pastores y teólogos a veces menosprecian materias sobre la educación, relegándolas a quienes desean especializarse en la educación cristiana, como si la educación del pueblo de Dios fuera solamente una de las muchas tareas de la iglesia. En cambio, el apóstol Pablo, al presentar una lista de los dones en Efesios 4, une el rol del pastor con el del maestro. El don de pastor-maestro es uno solo, no dos diferentes (v. 11). El pastor-maestro tiene el cometido de cuidar y alimentar (enseñar) al rebaño que Dios le ha encargado.

Lamentablemente, en la iglesia y en el seminario se da la tendencia de concentrarse casi exclusivamente en el contenido –la sana doctrina (que por cierto es de suma importancia)– y su transmisión mediante el discurso. Se da mucha importancia a la homilética, pero muy poca a cómo se aprende y cómo se utiliza la información en la vida. Pazmiño nota que generalmente la educación se considera como algo limitado a la institución del colegio y la experiencia en el salón de clase.[1] El énfasis recae en la transmisión de información por parte del maestro. Wilhoit, describiendo la escena contemporánea de la educación religiosa,[2] habla de cuatro acercamientos usados hoy día, uno de los cuales mucho se parece a la educación bancaria. Lo describe como "programas que enfatizan la escolaridad tradicional y ponen un alto valor en la retención de información (datos) y utilizan metodologías de transmisión".[3] Aclara que aunque hay pasajes bíblicos que aparentemente apoyan este acercamiento, la Biblia en su totalidad aboga por algo más profundo.[4] Sin embargo, la experiencia en los seminarios en América

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[1] Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997): 83.

[2] James C. Wilhoit, *Christian Education and the Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986): 61-96.

[3] *Ibid.*, 75.

[4] *Ibid*.

ha sido que la educación cristiana y teológica se ha enfocado principalmente desde la perspectiva del maestro, o sea, en el concepto de la enseñanza, la transmisión de información.

En gran parte la educación, como es entendida y practicada, es producto histórico-cultural, algo que se ha aprendido sobre la marcha (nos enseñaron que tenía que ser así). Esto es aún más cierto cuando no hemos estudiado cómo educar, sino solamente experimentado lo que se llama "educación". En muchos casos la medida de un buen profesor es cuántos títulos tiene, cuánto sabe y qué tan bien puede presentar esa información en el salón de clase. El maestro que puede ganar nuestra atención con su discurso y mantenerla, en lugar de aburrirnos, es nuestro modelo preferido.

Se ha trabajado en la "pedagogía" (la educación de los niños) durante muchos años, pero es solo en décadas recientes que se ha prestado atención a temas como la "andragogía" (educación de los adultos) y el aprendizaje,[5] principalmente en la educación secular. También en lo secular se escucha hablar de "estilos de aprendizaje" y de la "inteligencia emocional". No obstante, el enfoque más común en la educación sigue siendo en la entrega de la información, los detalles, la verdad, para que el estudiante los devuelva en nuestros exámenes –lo que Paulo Freire llama "educación bancaria".[6]

LA EDUCACIÓN BANCARIA Y SUS RESULTADOS

Fue Freire quien nos hizo reflexionar sobre este estilo de educación, que él caracterizó de una manera sencilla como el maestro haciendo depósitos de información en las mentes de los alumnos para luego pedirles que se la devuelvan en el examen y así comprueben que la han aprendido. Es un acercamiento altamente memorístico; solamente se tiene que recordar la información y repetirla. A veces ni siquiera se examina si el estudiante la entiende o si puede aplicarla en la vida. Freire señaló que hacer esto es tratar

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[5]Un artículo que despertó una gran discusión al respecto en el campo de la educación fue Robert B. Barr y John Tagg, "From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education", *Change* 27/6 (noviembre-diciembre 1995): 13-25. Los autores comentan que en la educación superior (el enfoque del artículo) el énfasis debería recaer en lo que los estudiantes aprenden, no en cómo el profesor enseña.

[6] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*, trad. Jorge Mellado, 23a. ed. (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979).

al alumno como un objeto o recipiente para la información –el banco en que se hacen depósitos para luego retirarlos.[7]

Núñez resume el pensamiento de Freire sobre este asunto en una forma concisa:

> En opinión de Freire, un análisis cuidadoso de la relación entre maestro y su estudiante revela que la educación tiene un carácter fundamentalmente narrativo, con un Sujeto que narra (el maestro) y un Objeto que pacientemente escucha (el alumno). En la narración, el contenido tiende a perder su vida y petrificarse. La más notable característica de esta educación narrativa es la sonoridad de las palabras, no su poder transformador. La narración (con el maestro como narrador) guía al estudiante a memorizar mecánicamente el contenido. Y lo que es peor, lo convierte en un "contenedor", en un "receptáculo" que el maestro tiene que "llenar". En esta forma la educación llega a ser una práctica de depositar, en la cual el alumno es el que recibe el depósito y el maestro, el que deposita el conocimiento. En lugar de comunicar, el maestro hace depósitos que el estudiante pacientemente recibe, memoriza y repite. Este es el concepto "bancario" de la educación. El conocimiento es una dádiva concedida por los que se consideran a sí mismos conocedores y en consecuencia creen estar por encima de un grupo de ignorantes.[8]

En esta relación de maestro-alumno, es obvio que hay un elemento de poder. El maestro está por encima del estudiante (porque conoce) y en muchas ocasiones usa esta autoridad para imponer a sus alumnos las exigencias que él quiera.[9] El estudiante que mejor recuerda la información tal como le fue impartida por el maestro y mejor se ajusta a sus demandas es premiado con una buena nota. El enfoque de la educación bancaria está en el recordar (por no decir "memorizar") la información presentada, no en su utilización en la vida.

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[7] Peter Senge destaca el aspecto mecanicista del sistema educativo actual. Según su crítica, el estudiante es tratado como un "objeto" en una línea de producción (como en una fábrica). Llega a confirmar la crítica de Freire. Peter Senge, "El sistema educativo de la era industrial", en Peter Senge *et al.*, *Escuelas que aprenden: Un manual de la Quinta Disciplina para educadores, padres de familia y todos los que se interesen en la educación*, trad. Jorge Cárdenas Nannetti (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2002): 39-71.

[8] Emilio A. Núñez, "Paulo Freire: Educación bancaria y educación liberadora", *Kairós* 38 (enero-julio 2006): 110. Estas oraciones de Núñez resumen bien lo que Freire expone en *Pedagogía del oprimido*: 69-95.

[9] Cp. Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002): 8-10, 23. En su capítulo 2 (págs. 23-45) ella analiza cómo la relación de poder cambia cuando el maestro se concentra en el aprendizaje del alumno en lugar de la enseñanza de un contenido.

Con este trasfondo, pasamos a considerar el impacto que la educación bancaria tiene sobre algunos elementos de la educación, y específicamente de la educación teológica.

En el aprendizaje del estudiante

En la educación bancaria el profesor desea que el estudiante demuestre que ha aprendido el contenido que le ha sido entregado en el salón de clase. Es el maestro quien "sabe" y transmite su sabiduría al estudiante, quien debe "aprender" esa masa de información. En casos extremos, el profesor impide a los alumnos hacerle preguntas sobre el material presentado. Casi da la impresión que el estudiante no debe pensar, sino solo escuchar, aprender como el maestro se lo dijo y devolverlo en la misma manera. En los grados inferiores de la escuela, esto llega al nivel de que el maestro escribe en la pizarra lo que el alumno debe copiar en su cuaderno, llevar a su casa y memorizar, para luego escribirlo (en las palabras exactas) en el examen. Si el estudiante lo puede hacer, "ha aprendido" el material.

El énfasis en este tipo de educación esta sobre la memorización de la información.[10] No se niega que el maestro pueda haber dado explicaciones y razones detrás del contenido, ni que haya hecho alguna aplicación, pero en la evaluación (examen) principalmente pide la devolución del contenido, y raras veces una explicación del porqué del mismo o una aplicación.

Esto implica que el estudiante que puede memorizar o recordar la información mejor recibe la calificación más alta. Se asume que será la persona más capaz de utilizar esta información en el futuro, lo cual no necesariamente es cierto. Por otro lado, hay personas a quienes les cuesta memorizar detalles, pero son muy listos para comprender cómo las cosas funcionan y cómo utilizar los conceptos en la vida, y estos recibirán calificaciones inferiores a los que pueden recordar la información tal como les fue entregada. Algunos combinan las dos aptitudes, pero muchos niños y adultos aprenden mejor cuando ven la utilidad en sus vidas de la información presentada.

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[10] William R. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996): 26-30, dice que llegamos a conocer algo nuevo o aprendemos en seis maneras diferentes: por medio del sentido común, por medio de una autoridad, por intuición o revelación, por la experiencia, por medio del uso del razonamiento inductivo y por uso del razonamiento deductivo.

Llegamos, entonces, a la siguiente situación. La persona que mejor puede recordar y devolver la información es premiado y puede avanzar al siguiente nivel de estudios, mientras que el que busca entender y aplicar la información se queda atrás. Las personas con la capacidad memorística avanzan hasta que son escogidos para ser los maestros, quienes luego requieren que sus estudiantes aprendan como ellos aprendieron, en forma bancaria. No se producen pensadores, sino personas capaces de retener más y más información. La sociedad no es cambiada, porque los alumnos no aprenden cómo aplicar la información a su medio ambiente. Freire comenta al respeto:

> …para mí lo que caracteriza a la educación no comenzó cuando apareció la palabra. Lo que caracteriza a la educación –el intento de conocer la realidad que relaciona a los sujetos, los sujetos cognoscitivos– es algo que apareció antes que una palabra como "educación". Ahora, aquí podemos descubrir muchas distorsiones y no podemos separar el trabajo del aprendizaje, etc.; ésta es uno de los peores dicotomías que hoy padecemos, la separación del mundo manual del intelectual, lo que convierte a las escuelas en casas para la distribución del conocimiento y no para el acto de conocer. Pero yo estoy completamente de acuerdo con sus críticas, porque la educación no es el trabajo de transmitir conocimientos sino el acto de conocer.[11]

En la educación bancaria el maestro se convierte en el sujeto y el alumno en un objeto, un receptáculo en que se deposita la información, en vez de otro sujeto que activamente emplea lo que su profesor le está inculcando.

En la transmisión de la doctrina

En un artículo reciente Núñez argumenta, y con razón, que la doctrina es algo que no cambia.[12] Judas exhorta que contendamos "ardientemente por la fe que ha sido una vez dada a los santos" (v. 3).[13] La verdad de Dios revelada en las Sagradas Escrituras es la fuente de la doctrina. Aunque existen diferencias en las interpretaciones de algunos textos, los evangélicos sostenemos que la Biblia es la verdad, y por lo tanto, la fe debe ser transmitida de una generación a la siguiente. Así, Pablo le da instrucciones claras a Timoteo: "Lo que has oído de mí ante muchos testigos, esto encarga a hombres fieles que sean idóneos para enseñar también a otros" (2 Ti. 2:2).

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[11] Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich *et al*., *La educación: Autocrítica de Paulo Freire/Ivan Illich* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Búsqueda, 1986): 88.

[12] Núñez, "Paulo Freire": 107-19.

[13] Todas las citas bíblicas se han tomado de la versión Reina Valera Revisada (1960).

Los conceptos de verdad absoluta y revelación divina tienen que ver con la metafísica y la epistemología,[14] campos filosóficos que tratan los temas de qué es verdad y cómo podemos conocerla. A través de los siglos ha habido un sinfín de respuestas a estas preguntas, pero lo que distingue al cristiano, y particularmente al creyente evangélico, es su afirmación que Dios, el creador del universo, se ha revelado a la humanidad en la persona de su Hijo Jesucristo, en sus actos registrados en el Antiguo y Nuevo Testamentos, y en el texto de la Biblia, y que esta revelación es verdad. También creemos que hay verdades en el mundo que no están reveladas en las Escrituras, pero que la palabra de Dios, la Biblia, tiene prioridad en asuntos de fe.

Sin embargo, el hecho que hay verdad bíblica que no cambia y que debe ser transmitida no implica que no exista más de una metodología para hacerlo. De hecho, podemos hacerlo de muchas maneras, siempre y cuando la verdad no sea distorsionada. Obviamente habrá métodos de mayor o menor utilidad, así como maneras inapropiadas. Aquí hemos de considerar al maestro y al alumno como personas, tema en que puede haber choque frontal entre la antropología bíblica y el humanismo secular contemporáneo. Entonces, la metodología debe ser evaluada mediante la verdad de Dios acerca del carácter y el actuar de ser humano, y no solamente desde una perspectiva secular. Este es un aspecto en que hay que analizar la propuesta de Freire y su crítica de la educación bancaria, ya que su pensamiento guarda mucha relación con la Teología de la Liberación, una corriente con bastante influencia humanística, sociológica y marxista.

En la formación del carácter

Una de las grandes debilidades de la educación bancaria es que en su forma tradicional no busca contribuir a la formación del carácter del alumno. Se limita a impartir conocimientos. Sin embargo, contribuye a una transformación, aunque una que no todos dirían positiva. Freire comenta que así como muchos pobres desean adquirir terreno para convertirse en terratenientes, de la misma manera muchos alumnos desean convertirse en maestros. Ambos el terrateniente y el maestro ejercitan poder y control sobre otros. Lo que sucede es que el estudiante oprimido, al lograr una educación en un

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[14] Para más información sobre la metafísica y la epistemología y su relación con la educación, véanse George Knight, *Philosophy & Educatian: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1998); y Robert W. Pazmiño, *Cuestiones fundamentales de la educación cristiana* (Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1995).

sistema bancario, obtener su título y llegar a ser un profesional, lejos de convertirse en un maestro comprensivo que busca ayudar al alumno a aprender, se convierte en lo que antes odiaba, otro opresor más.[15]

Para comprender las consecuencias de la educación bancaria, especialmente en la formación del carácter, debemos reflexionar un tanto acerca del impacto de la sociedad sobre el individuo. Toda sociedad se organiza en "clases", grupos con mayor y menor importancia, poder y estatus. Aun en las sociedades que buscan evitar toda distinción de clases, afirmando que todos son iguales, los que detentan el poder de gobernar están en una clase superior a los gobernados. En generaciones pasadas hubo (por ejemplo, en Europa) reyes, duques, artesanos, peones, etc. Hoy día, las clases suelen clasificarse como la alta, la media y la baja, con un número sinfín de grados dentro de cada una. La cultura asigna muchos privilegios y derechos a la clase alta, y a la más baja, ninguno.

Hay diferentes maneras de subir de nivel social. Hoy en día el medio más común es el dinero, pero otro es la educación (o la combinación de las dos cosas). Un título universitario permite al pobre de una clase baja salir de su estado de oprimido y pasar a ser un profesional de la clase media. Esto le da mayores privilegios y derechos, incluyendo, aparentemente, los de considerarse superior a las personas de la clase baja y, en consecuencia, utilizar (léase "oprimir") al pobre.

El que la educación bancaria opera desde la base de maestro (sujeto) hacia el alumno (objeto-receptáculo) establece una relación del que tiene poder y autoridad (por controlar toda la información y los procesos de la escuela) hacia el que no los tiene (totalmente dependiente del maestro). El estudiante que se sujeta y adquiere los conocimientos (información) de acuerdo a las reglas impuestas por el maestro puede alcanzar el nivel de maestro o profesional y convertirse en un "poderoso" que luego puede ejercer dominio sobre otros. De este modo el oprimido (estudiante) se convierte en opresor (maestro), una transformación que no muy bien encaja en el modelo que nos dejó

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[15] En el primer capítulo de *Pedagogía del oprimido*, Freire trata este tema desde la perspectiva del binomio oprimido-opresor y la necesidad del oprimido de librarse de la opresión. De allí el título de su libro. En el mismo expone un método para la "liberación" del oprimido, uniendo su metodología pedagógica con un fin político-social. Su objetivo con la educación es liberar al pobre de las ataduras de un sistema social que le oprime. Usa su metodología para crear una "concientización", en que el oprimido reconoce la opresión y busca librarse de ella. De modo que la finalidad de su método de alfabetización era más que aprender a leer y escribir; era librar de la opresión. En ese momento histórico, los intelectuales latinoamericanos estaban muy entusiasmados con la filosofía marxista. No es sorprendente, entonces, que los teólogos jóvenes de ese tiempo utilizaran a Freire (también muy influenciado por conceptos marxistas) para desarrollar una "teología de la liberación".

Cristo. En lugar de servir a los que están bajo su cuidado, ejerce su poder y exige obediencia. Aprende a mandar y controlar cuando llega a la posición de autoridad. ¡Y esto dentro de nuestros propios seminarios! No debería sorprendernos que nuestros egresados que entran como novatos en el pastorado tengan grandes conflictos interpersonales.

Entonces, se puede concluir que la educación bancaria como metodología entraña serios problemas. En lugar de promover el desarrollo de carácter cristiano, especialmente en los aspectos de la humildad y el servicio, influye más para la formación de lo contrario. Esta realidad en la preparación de pastores y líderes para las iglesias crea muchísimas dificultades cuando el graduado siente que él es quien sabe y la congregación debe asumir el papel de aprendiz. Resulta, entonces, una situación de opresor y oprimidos dentro de la iglesia.

A pesar de estas dificultades, hay que recordar, como señala Núñez, que el contenido para el cristiano evangélico es elemento fundamental de la educación eclesial. Queda entonces la necesidad de encontrar una metodología que no requiere eliminar u olvidar el contenido "una vez por siempre dado a los santos", pero que conduce al aprendiz a una profundización en su relación con Dios y a la utilización de la información en su vida y ministerio.

RESPUESTAS AL PROBLEMA

Obviamente, no es suficiente señalar un problema sin presentar una alternativa mejor. En lugar de pasar directamente a esta, miraremos con más cuidado la propuesta de Freire y también consideraremos la de John Dewey, quien abogaba por una educación pragmática, con énfasis en la preparación para practicar una profesión. Estas dos opciones tienden a ver el contenido como la base para el aprendizaje del alumno, y la utilidad para cambiar a la gente o prepararla para la vida como lo principal de la educación. Wilhoit las clasificaría dentro de lo que él llama "desarrollismo", la corriente que promueve el uso instrumental del conocimiento –que el alumno pueda hacer algo útil con lo aprendido.[16]

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[16] Wilhoit, *Christian Education*: 78.

Luego de considerar las dos perspectivas, finalizaremos la sección con un análisis y explicación de la "formación integral", que planteamos como una opción mejor que las de Freire y Dewey.

Freire: Educación para la praxis –para la vida

Uno de los factores que dio tan buen resultado a la metodología de Freire en la alfabetización era su uso de lo que él llama "palabras generadoras", palabras importantes en la vida de los campesinos, que ellos empleaban a diario y que eran de utilidad para su bienestar. Por no tratar de conceptos abstractos sin relevancia para su vida, estas palabras eran más fáciles de asimilar y recordar. Freire enseñaba el alfabeto y luego dividía las palabras generadoras en sílabas. De ahí mostraba cómo se puede generar muchas sílabas diferentes cambiando la vocal, y que estas pueden unirse e intercambiarse para formar nuevas palabras. Así logró que los analfabetas aprendieran a leer y escribir en unas seis semanas.[17]

Freire sugiere que el maestro debe practicar una "educación problematizadora", que, en lugar de ser el acto de depositar, amarrar o transferir conocimientos y valores, supera la contradicción educador-educando mediante la creación de una relación dialógica.[18] Así, el docente, en vez de ser la persona que transmite todo al alumno, llega a ser un co-aprendiz o, quizá mejor, el guía que ayuda al estudiante a aprender la verdad para sí mismo. Ya no se enfoca principalmente en el contenido, sino en enseñar cómo aprender.

En la educación centrada en la transmisión de nuevos conocimientos, el alumno deja de aprender cuando no tiene maestro, pero en el acercamiento freiriano se convierte en estudiante para el resto de su vida, porque aprende cómo seguir aprendiendo sin la presencia del profesor.

Escobar resume el significado pedagógico del método de alfabetización de Freire.

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[17] Para un excelente resumen de la metodología freiriana, véase Samuel Escobar, *Paulo Freire: Una pedagogía latinoamericana* (México: Centro de Comunicación Central CUPSA y Editorial Kyrios, 1993): 63-78. Otros resúmenes se encuentran en Ana María Araujo Freire y Donaldo Macedo, eds., *The Paulo Freire Reader* (Nueva York: Continuum, 2001): 80-94; y Daniel S. Schipani, *Paulo Freire: Educador cristiano* (Grand Rapids: Libros Desafío, 2002), especialmente las págs. 31-44.

[18] Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*: 85.

Si reflexionamos acerca del método y las técnicas de Freire tal como se han aplicado en una variedad de circunstancias, desde el punto de vista de la pedagogía, saltan a la vista ciertos valores que constituyen un aporte permanente de sus intuiciones. Los hemos agrupado en cinco apartados…[19]

Los cinco aportes son: (1) un método pensado específicamente para el adulto, (2) el dinamismo participativo de la descodificación, (3) la percepción formal integral, (4) la reformulación del papel del educador y (5) el estímulo a la persistencia y conservación.[20]

Nunca debemos olvidar que lo que en gran parte hace eficaz la metodología de Freire es su enlace con la situación de opresión que viven los analfabetos u otros. Funciona porque parte de palabras generadoras tomadas de su mundo y les enseña que no son cautivos del sistema de opresión, sino que, apoderándose de su mundo, pueden ser libres y controlar su propio destino. Al conocer y apropiar las palabras de su mundo, ellos adquieren poder no solamente sobre las palabras, sino también sobre aspectos de su mundo. En este sentido, la metodología les proporciona cierta libertad.

Schipani nos clarifica cómo el proceso funciona.[21] El maestro y sus alumnos exploran juntos una situación conflictiva, pero en un ambiente de confianza y solidaridad. Buscan aprender a explorar en confianza, sin que haya relación de poder entre el que conoce y el que no conoce. Van tras descubrimientos pertinentes, "un momento de intuición y comprensión", o "concientización". Este paradigma creativo, consecuencia de las nuevas comprensiones, viene asociado a cierta liberación y reorientación de energía y una sensación placentera de cierto control sobre la vida propia. Luego ocurre la interpretación y verificación, donde debe surgir la acción responsable.

La tarea de aprendizaje se promueve en el proceso continuo de reflexión/acción que apunta no solo al beneficio inmediato y personal de los participantes, sino a prepararlos para que den cuenta de la esperanza y de la visión de un mundo mejor.[22]

Se levantan algunas preguntas relevantes para los educadores evangélicos. ¿Esta metodología puede usarse para ayudar al creyente en su aprendizaje del contenido bíblico

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[19] Escobar, *Paulo Freire*: 75.

[20] *Ibid.*, 75-78.

[21] Schipani, *Paulo Freire*, especialmente el cap. 2. Lo que sigue es resumido de las págs. 36-44.

[22] *Ibid.*, 43.

y su aplicación a su vida de tal manera que sea transformado en una nueva criatura (2 Co. 5:17)? ¿Queremos que el evangelio liberte a los esclavos del pecado, sin importar su nivel social? O ¿preferimos las consecuencias de la educación bancaria donde el maestro es superior a su alumno? Cristo expresó con claridad que "el que hace la voluntad de mi Padre" entrará en el reino de los cielos (Mt. 7:21) y nos mandó a hacer discípulos "enseñándoles que guarden todas las cosas que os he mandado" (Mt. 28:20). No basta con enseñarles la información o la doctrina. Hay que enseñarles a "guardar" o aplicar la doctrina, practicarla en sus vidas.

Dewey y James: Educación pragmática – para la profesión

John Dewey es reconocido como el educador estadounidense de mayor renombre en el siglo XX.[23] Él y William James, filósofo contemporáneo, promovieron el concepto del pragmatismo en la educación. James lo definió como "la actitud de alejar la vista de las cosas, principios, categorías o supuestas necesidades primarias, y de mirar las cosas, frutos, consecuencias o hechos últimos".[24] La implicación para la educación era quitar el enfoque principal del contenido de la verdad proveniente del pasado y colocarlo en el beneficio o resultado útil de la educación. El pragmatismo buscaba una verdad aprendida por la experiencia y la reflexión en medio de dificultades y problemas de la vida, y que sirviera para el presente y el futuro. Lo importante ya no era el contenido de la educación, sino la experiencia del aprendizaje. El alumno aprendía cuando podía relacionar la información con su vida.

Para el pragmatista, el conocimiento tiene su raíz en la experiencia. Esto es lo opuesto de la educación bancaria. Promueve que los estudiantes tengan mentes activas, que exploren su realidad en lugar de ser receptores pasivos. No simplemente reciben conocimiento, sino que lo adquieren al pasar activamente por la vida, encontrando problemas u otras situaciones que impiden momentáneamente su avance. Al reflexionar y

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[23] Michael W. Apple y Kenneth Teitelbaum, "John Dewey 1859-1952", en *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey*, ed. Joy A. Palmer (Nueva York: Routledge, 2001): 177. Según Lorenzo Luzuriaga, *Antología pedagógica*, 5a. ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1992): 175-76, hasta se le podría "considerar como el pedagoga más influyente de la educación contemporánea".

[24] Michael J. Anthony y Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003): 328.

actuar ante la dificultad y el medio ambiente, aprenden.[25] También la realidad –lo que es real– tiene su base en la experiencia. El pragmatista insiste en que el conocimiento no puede divorciarse de la experiencia. Uno aprende solamente cuando experimenta algo en la vida, y la verdad es lo que funciona.[26]

Para Dewey, la educación se trataba de conocimiento centrado en el estudiante y obtenido mediante la investigación, no por escuchar un discurso del maestro. Él promovió la proclividad norteamericana de descartar la filosofía especulativa y enfocarse en las personas, los problemas de la sociedad, la economía y cambios en el medio ambiente.[27] Ya que la verdad para el pragmatista no es absoluta, sino lo que el estudiante aprende en la interacción entre el conocimiento y su experiencia, la educación debe centrarse en lo que le es práctico y funcional, lo que le prepara para una vida fructífera.

Dewey enfatizó que no hay absolutos, que la verdad es relativa, algo que funciona hoy y puede no funcionar en el futuro, y cuando no funcione, deja de ser la verdad. La mejor educación es una interacción entre el conocimiento y la vida, que se concentra en la aplicación del conocimiento a la solución de problemas reales en la vida del estudiante, preparándole para enfrentar las dificultades futuras. Ya que la verdad es lo que funciona en el ahora, la retención de la información no tiene importancia en la educación.[28] Lo que sí es útil es educar para pensar y usar la información en la creación de nuevas soluciones a nuevas dificultades.

Es obvio que el creyente tendrá graves dificultades con algunos de los supuestos del pragmatismo.[29] No acepta que lo que funciona es la verdad y que lo que es verdad hoy puede no serlo mañana. Sin embargo, Dewey y sus colegas señalaron que se aprende cuando se ve la aplicación de la información en la experiencia. Negaron que la memorización fuera aprendizaje y destacaron la importancia de que el alumno fuese activamente involucrado con la información. Según ellos, esto es verdadero aprendizaje.

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[25] Knight, *Philosophy and Education*: 64.

[26] *Ibid.*, 62-63.

[27] Anthony y Benson, *Exploring*: 329-30.

[28] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*: 100-102.

[29] Para una de las más extensas evaluaciones del pensamiento de Dewey desde una perspectiva cristiana evangélica, véase Kenneth O. Gangel y Warren S. Benson, *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983): 292-304.

Formación integral –para la totalidad del ser

El acercamiento que llamamos "formación integral" difiere de los de Freire y

Dewey y se encaja en lo "transformacional".[30] Halla apoyo en Romanos 12:1-2:

> Así que, hermanos, os ruego por las misericordias de Dios, que presentéis vuestros cuerpos en sacrificio vivo, santo, agradable a Dios, que es vuestro culto racional. No os conforméis a este siglo, sino transformaos por medio de la renovación de vuestro entendimiento, para que comprobéis cuál sea la buena voluntad de Dios, agradable y perfecta.

Según este texto, el conocimiento debe transformar a la gente, a fin de que

compruebe la voluntad de Dios en su vida. Esto va más allá de la transmisión del

conocimiento o aun el desarrollo de la persona. La primera puede proporcionar los

conocimientos de la verdad, y el segundo el cómo usar los conocimientos en la vida y

ministerio, pero la formación integral intenta transformar a la imagen de Cristo. Ya que el

carácter de la persona influye en cómo utiliza su conocimiento y habilidades, su

transformación tiene que tener la prioridad en la educación cristiana.

La expresión "formación integral" implica dos cambios grandes frente a la

educación tradicionalmente practicada en nuestras escuelas, universidades y seminarios.

Habla de "formación" en vez de "educación", de modo que se refiere a algo más que la

transmisión de información. El vocablo tiende a relacionarse más con el carácter y las

habilidades prácticas y menos con la capacidad mental. Además, la frase habla de una

formación que es "integral", para toda la persona en cada aspecto de su ser, en lugar de

solamente un dominio de conocimientos para la memoria o la mente. En verdad, las dos

palabras enfatizan que la educación debe impactar la totalidad del educando.

Formación. El sustantivo "formación" se deriva del verbo "formar". Al formar

un objeto o a un individuo, se trabaja en darle una forma específica. En cierto sentido,

todo programa de preparación ministerial usará el término, porque su objetivo es preparar

(entiéndase "formar") a personas para el ministerio. Empero, hay una diferencia marcada

entre la mayoría de programas y uno basado en la formación integral. Los programas

tradicionalmente han enfocado el aprendizaje de conocimientos, con el supuesto de que

los estudiantes los utilizarán en su vida y ministerio. El profesor enseña la información, y

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[30] Wilhoit, *Christian Education*: 89-96.

allí termina su responsabilidad. Hay programas universitarios diseñados de la misma manera, pero aun en el campo secular este tipo de educación es deficiente.

Como parte de una materia de la universidad, el autor conoció muchas instituciones de educación superior en el Estado de Texas. En cierta ocasión el profesor nos llevó a una escuela técnica que ofrecía una carrera de dos años, que conducía al título de Asociado en Artes (A.A.). Uno de los docentes de esta institución nos relató un comentario de un empresario que contrataba a sus egresados. Según este, los graduados del programa de dos años entraban a trabajar inmediatamente con mucha eficacia en el desempeño de sus labores, pero los que se recibían de ingenieros en la universidad de más renombre del estado tardaban un año en el trabajo antes de poder generar algún beneficio positivo para la compañía. El programa de la escuela técnica formaba a sus estudiantes, mientras que la carrera universitaria les daba mucho conocimiento. Obviamente estos recibían mucho más conocimiento, pero necesitaban un año de experiencia posterior para poder ser de mucha utilidad.

Los programas de algunos de nuestros seminarios se parecen a esta carrera universitaria, con consecuencias muy graves para los egresados. Al entrar en el ministerio necesitan un año para aprender cómo aplicar bien la información recibida en el salón de clase. Durante este año cometen errores que debilitan su liderazgo a tal grado que muchos no continúan en el ministerio. ¡Cuánto mejor sería organizar nuestros programas para que los estudiantes sean formados a saber ejercitar su ministerio como el egresado de la escuela técnica!

Los seminarios tienden a seguir el modelo universitario más que el de las escuelas técnicas, tal vez porque en el pasado estas no se clasificaban como educación superior. Es muy interesante notar que algunas de las instituciones de educación superior en México se llaman "institutos tecnológicos", como, por ejemplo, el Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITEM). México ha avanzado a pasos gigantescos económicamente en las últimas décadas. No es de sorprenderse que Monterrey sea la ciudad principal para la industria mexicana, y que el ITEM tenga sedes en todo el país y se esté extendiendo a otros países también.[31]

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[31] En 2006 se anunciaron planes para abrir una extensión en la ciudad de Guatemala.

Al interesarnos en la acreditación gubernamental de nuestros programas, muchas veces somos presionados fuertemente a seguir el modelo universitario, pero ¿a qué costo? Nuestros egresados quieren el reconocimiento, porque creen que les abrirá puertas tanto dentro del ministerio como afuera en el campo secular. Sin embargo, el modelo universitario no es lo mejor a menos que el programa entero enfoque una formación para el ministerio, no solamente los conocimientos necesarios. Si no formamos a los estudiantes a la vez que les damos el conocimiento, se enfrentarán con dificultades al iniciar su ministerio. Algunos abandonarán el ministerio como consecuencia de esta preparación defectuosa y no, como a veces se ha dicho, porque "no fueron llamados al ministerio". La culpa es de nosotros los educadores, no de ellos.

Integral. Al tratar el término "integral", amplificamos el sentido de la formación. En la educación el vocablo se usa para referirse a una preparación que abarca todos los aspectos del estudiante, en su ser, conocer y hacer. En inglés se emplea la palabra "*holistic*". Hablando del "*holism*" en la educación cristiana, Wilhoit menciona que:

> La educación principalmente busca formar, informar, desarrollar e influir en el lado cognoscitivo del individuo, pero cada aspecto del aprendiz tiene por lo menos un papel indirecto que jugar en la realización de esta tarea limitada.[32]

Muchos de los descubrimientos de los psicólogos de desarrollo nos recuerdan que somos personas complejas, cuya mente, cuerpo y alma están unidos. Por lo tanto, el maestro tiene que considerar a la persona en su totalidad.[33] Lo básico de una educación integral es que busca formar al educando de esta manera.[34]

En comparación con la educación bancaria, una integral busca educar al estudiante en su mente (el saber), en su alma y corazón (el ser) y en sus habilidades para

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[32] Wilhoit, *Christian Education*: 127.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Guillermo Taylor, *Capacitación misionera transcultural* (Miami: Editorial Unilit, 1994): 22, presenta un excelente ejemplo de una formación integral misionera con nueve elementos, al parecer siete de ellos requeridos. Estos son: (1) las disciplinas y el desarrollo personal, (2) la vida y ministerio en la iglesia local, (3) los estudios bíblicos y teológicos (formales y no formales), (4) los estudios transculturales, (5) una capacitación antes de salir al campo de trabajo (por parte de la agencia misionera), (6) la capacitación en el campo (por parte de la iglesia receptora) y (7) la capacitación durante el servicio en el campo (por parte de la iglesia o agencia). Los otros dos elementos tienen que ver más indirectamente con la formación del nuevo misionero, siendo (8) la capacitación de los capacitadores de misioneros y (9) una visión global (capacitación de pastores y directivos de agencias misioneras).

el ministerio (el hacer). Sin embargo, a diferencia de programas tradicionales, donde estos tres aspectos son enfocados en diferentes materias del currículum, se hace una integración de ellos en cada materia. Los seminarios han tomado en cuenta las tres áreas, especialmente los conocimientos y las habilidades, pero cuando vemos que los estudiantes no muestran madurez espiritual, lo que hacemos es añadir una o más materias de "vida espiritual". No obstante, las tres áreas no son integradas y cada materia enfoca un solo aspecto de la persona completa.

En gran parte esta separación resulta de seguir el modelo universitario de las "disciplinas" o "áreas de especialización", pero puede convertirse en una competencia, aunque inconscientemente. Lo cierto es que los estudiantes siempre tendrán sus profesores favoritos, y cuando hay mucho énfasis en la especialización con la exclusión de los otros aspectos, los estudiantes pueden adoptar la actitud de que las materias de Biblia o teología son importantes, y la predicación o vida espiritual no. Si no perciben relación entre un área y la otra, dirigen su atención al área de afinidad e ignoran las otras.

Una formación integral toma en cuenta los aspectos positivos de Dewey y su concepto de educación pragmática para ofrecer una educación que prepara a la persona para el ministerio,[35] pero los que siguen el pragmatismo no consideran la importancia de que los conocimientos y habilidades usados en un ministerio pasen por un corazón en comunión íntima con Dios. Los discípulos anduvieron con Cristo por unos dos años, durante los cuales él los iba enseñando muchas cosas acerca del reino de Dios. Con todo, cuando les hablaba de su muerte y resurrección, ellos pensaron en quién de ellos sería el mayor y buscaron posiciones de poder y autoridad en el reino.[36] Las últimas palabras de Pedro a su Señor antes de la crucifixión mostraban una lamentable autoconfianza, hasta el punto de negar lo que Cristo le dijo que haría.[37] Los discípulos tuvieron el mismo problema que los fariseos, corazones endurecidos.[38]

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[35] Dewey hablaba de la educación para la profesión. Considero personalmente que aunque pueda haber similitudes entre el ministerio cristiano y una profesión, el ministerio tiene en su raíz el aspecto de servicio, a Dios y a la humanidad, y hacer del ministerio una profesión es quitarle lo básico.

[36] Marcos 9:30-34; Lucas 22:14-21; Marcos 10:32-45.

[37] Marcos 14:27-31.

[38] Cp. Marcos 3:1-5 con 6:45-52.

Esto también nos demuestra con claridad que una preparación que enfatiza solamente los conocimientos es inadecuada. Una educación bancaria no prepara a toda la persona (mente, alma y cuerpo). Aunque hay que darle al estudiante la información bíblica, recibida por revelación divina, si esta información no llega a transformar el hombre interior, no podemos quedarnos satisfechos.

Freire criticó la educación bancaria porque no parecía tener relación con la vida del estudiante. Logró éxito con los analfabetos porque supo mostrarles cómo el leer y el escribir se relacionaba con su vida y sus necesidades cotidianas. Una formación integral debe hacer lo mismo, llegando a ser una educación práctica, útil, transformadora. La formación integral enfatiza el "conocer" y "hacer", dejando una educación útil como Friere, pero supera a la educación puramente freiriana porque enfatiza también el "ser" – enfocando la persona del individuo y su relación con Dios. La formación integral en la educación teológica desarrolla la totalidad del individuo –su mente (conocimiento), su cuerpo (habilidades) y su alma o espíritu (aspecto espiritual y relacional).

CONCLUSIÓN

En este artículo hemos expuesto las diferencias entre la educación bancaria y la formación integral. Comenzamos notando que el argumento que sostiene que la educación bancaria es necesaria en la educación teológica porque tenemos que preservar la sana doctrina no tiene validez, pues la educación bancaria es una metodología de enseñanza independiente de la cuestión de la veracidad del conocimiento transmitido. El pragmatismo de Dewey y la metodología de Freire se acercan al aprendizaje desde la perspectiva del desarrollismo, considerando que el conocimiento es lo que el aprendiz descubre en el proceso. El teólogo evangélico rechaza esta perspectiva de lo que es la verdad. Sin embargo, cuando el alumno relaciona lo estudiado con la vida y lo aplica a la realidad que vive en el momento (la postura de Freire y Dewey), la educación da mejores resultados que cuando el alumno sólo memoriza información. A la vez, ni la transmisión de información ni el desarrollo de habilidades son suficientes para la educación teológica.

Para una filosofía o teología bíblica de la educación, se tiene que pensar en una formación integral, donde la educación busca formar la totalidad de la persona. La conversión es solamente el inicio de la relación del creyente con Dios, la cual se va profundizando a través de toda su vida. Cristo, al discipular a sus seguidores, les dio

información, pero estaba igualmente o más interesado en la condición de su corazón que en sus conocimientos y habilidades. Nótense sus palabras en Mateo 12:34-35: "Porque de la abundancia del corazón habla la boca. El hombre bueno, del buen tesoro del corazón saca buenas cosas; y el hombre malo, del mal tesoro saca malas cosas". La condición del corazón impacta lo que decimos y hacemos –no nuestros conocimientos. Entonces, la educación teológica tiene que comenzar con el carácter como la prioridad número uno.

El ser influye en cómo el saber y el hacer se evidencian en nuestro ministerio, pero en realidad no se puede aislar un elemento de los otros en la preparación de la persona en su totalidad. En una formación integral el especialista en vida espiritual fundamenta su enseñanza en la verdad bíblica y muestra cómo esta cambia la vida y ministerio del alumno. El expositor bíblico explica el texto y señala cómo contribuye a mejorar nuestra relación con Dios y nuestro ministerio. El profesor de homilética o liderazgo demuestra del texto bíblico cómo el ministro debe relacionarse con su Dios antes de ejercer su ministerio para Dios. La especialista en un área no puede limitarse a uno de los tres elementos, esperando que otros especialistas cubran los otros dos. Cada uno tiene que enseñar integralmente –recordando que la meta final es la formación de la persona integral para el ministerio.

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Reflections Upon Theological Reflection: How One Pastor Processed Ministry

By Daryl Busby

Abstract. Ministry methods abound, but enduring principles are few. Inundated by tantalizing methods; and yet, confronted with the reality of church, how do church leaders think through the issues of life and ministry? Reflective pastors discover their own reliable ministry principles; and thus, become less reliant upon the latest fads and more founded upon their own sense of discernment. This article asks the question, "In today's world filled with vast arrays of methods, how do discerning church leaders think through the opportunities and challenges of ministry?" A second question asks, "How should evangelicals respond to the ongoing discussion of theological reflection and what distinctive principles should guide their own discernment processes?"

Pastor Fred pulled the letter marked "personal and private" from his mailbox and slipped into his church office to read it. After sixteen years of pastoral work, he had an uneasy feeling. Until now, his week had gone exceedingly well and Fred's attendance at the two day Elm Creek Church Ministry conference had provided him with fresh ideas that gave promise for real change in his congregation. Throughout his ministry, Fred had experienced many exhilarating "ministry moments" as he applied methods learned at such workshops; however, now in the privacy of his office, he began to read this disturbing letter with a foreboding sense:

"Dear Pastor: We write this letter to inform you that after much prayer, our families will be leaving the church and attending…"

His instincts were right and swords could not stab deeper. Another key couple, along with who knows how many of their friends, would be leaving for the new, emerging church. Fred could accept other people leaving (frankly, he was glad to see some walk out), but these couples had served in key lay leadership roles. Now, even they were quitting. Although Fred had realized both ministerial highs and agonizing lows, this had to be rated at the bottom of lows.

Later that busy week, in the minutes captured between hospital calls and board reports, he pondered, "How do I determine real success or failure?" Angry and overwhelmed by a sense of abandonment, Fred questioned, "How can I keep this up? At Elm Creek Ministries, it looks so easy and their methods make sense." Distressed and needing to talk to someone, Fred chronicled these thoughts in his journal: "Lord, sometimes I envy those who have left. I too, want to quit! I have tried these new methods and it brings limited results but buckets of stress. What do you want me to learn from these failures to keep a sure footing for both the church and my pastoral leadership? What went wrong?"

This pastoral sense of helplessness and overpowering discouragement is repeated countless times. A landmark study conducted by the Alban Institute concluded, "A key finding in our interviews was that most of the major Christian and Jewish denominations are experiencing or will experience a shortage of clergy to meet current congregational demands" (Wind, Rendle et al. 2001). The workload has become simply unmanageable and unreasonable for many students considering this as a life calling. In one study cited by the Alban report, 20 percent of Presbyterian pastors were in advanced stages of burnout. The Fuller Institute also reported that 50 per cent of pastors felt incapable of meeting the demands of the office, and 90 percent felt inadequately trained to fulfill the role (Wind, Rendle et al. 2001). Quitting rates for clergy in various countries reportedly rose through the 1980's and 1990's so that in some denominations, the current stark reality is that the attrition rate for some denominations outpaces the intake of new clergy. The Pastor's Institute reported an annual turnover rate of 25 percent for clergy in the United States (Vande Bunte, February 26, 2005). George Jacobs, founder of the Davidson clergy Center, suggested that this number represents the equivalent of an entire seminary class leaving their churches every day of the year (Vande Bunte, February 26, 2005). According to John Smith of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, 53 percent of leaders have considered leaving the ministry (2000) and the situation in Canada is similar (as cited in Broman, 2005, p. 8). George Barna researched pastor's lives and concluded, "I became keenly aware of the anguish, confusion and frustration that characterize much of the daily experience of pastors" (Barna 1993, 12).

Many European and North America churches have either plateaued or slipped into decline. While exciting reports of phenomenal growth come from South East Asia, South

America and mega-churches, the European Values Study (EVS) found that between 1981 and 1990, the proportion of non-church members rose in European and North American sectors. In the United States the non-member ratio rose from 6% to 23%. In Canada the percentage rose from 11% to 26% while in France it moved from 26% to 39%; and most significantly, in the Netherlands numbers went from 37% to 49% (van der Ven 1998, 25-26).

However, lest we despair, a promising new church Reformation has emerged. Factors such as new music forms, the rapid spread across all denominations of Alpha, the growth of both mega churches and emergent churches, the increase in volunteerism through retiring Baby Boomers, the redefining of denominationalism and the explosion of small groups all give reason to hope. Methods, books, and seminars abound in unparalleled numbers.

But here is the catch: This alluring promise of success rests upon the innate ability of the pastor to "succeed" in this market driven world. Improve the product, implement the right method, glitz the marketing scheme, spice up the Power-point, energize the youth programming and people will come and/or stay. Church leaders can buy the latest book or manual for ministry; some grasp eagerly at these innovations while others become cynical of anything new.

All this brings us back to Fred and his urgent need to discern what happened to trigger this letter and smoldering firestorm. Pastor Fred's own discipline of intentional theological reflection included a group of fellow pastors who met regularly to process their various church experiences. Although he also trusted the church leaders within his own community, Fred looked to these ministry colleagues as fellow pastors traveling together. On this day, he shared his letter and feelings.

The Contextual Situation (Concrete Experience)

The pastoral group began with hugs and coffee; but, always coupled with a prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit to guide their thinking and ensuing actions. When the pastors invited Fred to share his story, both the stark facts and his emotional responses, he talked frankly about simmering tensions, terse words; and eventually, shouting matches that all preceded the painful letter. His careful re-telling of the events

from the past months formed an essential foundation for the reflection to follow and enable the pastors to enter into the reflection with him.

Analysis of Issues (Reflective Observation)

Fred then began to share his bitter, confused angst and with the support and discerning questions offered by the pastors, he vented many deep questions: Why did they want to leave? What went wrong? Were their reactions valid? Did he miss the signals? To what extent was he responsible? Does the church leadership bear some blame? Should he quit?

This second stage, analysis of issues, probed beneath the surface and sought to identify underlying, contributing questions. The essential goal was, in the presence of these friends, to prioritize the underlying issues and identify the so called heart of the matter. Here, the pastors floated opinions, but with an open mind to all possible options.

In essence, three questions emerged: (1) How did this impact Fred and the others in the church leadership? (2) What potential explanations could be offered for the event? (3) Most importantly, what central principles or themes needed exploring? What had God intended for Fred to learn through this? Get beyond the other-person-blaming and discern ministry principles to glean from this stress.

The final question is vital. Before moving further through the process, Fred needed to identify the core concern that needed attention. Although many issues seemed worthy of pursuit, only one or two could be meaningfully probed.

"Is the fact that these people abandoned you the primary concern?" asked one participant. "Do you feel a sense of failure or abandonment?"

Another one probed, "How do you define successful or floundering ministry?"

One pastors asked, "Fred, do you doubt your call to ministry? Do you really want to quit?"

However, another impatient pastor folded his arms and gruffly brushed off the deserters, "Let them go," he blurted out. "Lots of people have left my church and I continue on unfazed! The disciples left Jesus and these have abandoned you! After all, remember in the Bible, 'Numbers comes after Exodus!'"

The other colleagues looked at this pastor with confusion; but, kept probing Fred and his deepest emotions, the primary heart of the matter. After some prayerful and

candid reflection, Fred confessed that, although the other issues did gnaw at his mind, the real nub was his own sense of dissatisfaction with the local church. He admitted, "I guess I am never satisfied with the church. I always want more and better. When is the church successful?"

Theological/ Social Science Reflection (Abstract Conceptualizing)

Drawing from their collective theological and lengthy ministry experiences, the pastors embarked on an invigorating discussion of, "When is the church healthy?" and for Fred, this was the real issue. Together they drew upon common understandings of the church, both from Scripture and from their own varied ministry experiences. After a lively discussion, the oldest pastor offered his perspective. "The church will remain imperfect until Jesus comes; and we need to accept that. Even in the successful churches, there remain flaws often hidden behind the glitz of the seminars." The others nodded and expressed a passion to see the church become all she should be. This emerging master theme provided the deeper discussion; and their interaction moved fluidly between the Biblical texts and the stories of their own lives. Fred found this stage the most revealing, but knew the insights came with his own transparency about personal and unrealistic assumptions about the church.

With grace and candor, several commented that Fred seemed driven to produce the perfect church. One pastor smiled and wisely probed, "Are you willing to live with an imperfect church...after all your wife lives with *you!"*

Fred laughed...and listened.

Application (Active Experimentation)

Reflection without action remains pointless. Therefore, the pastors urged Fred to discern prayerfully how the insights might be implemented. When they offered practical advice, Fred identified some practical actions; but beginning with a personal confession of his simmering resentment. He lived in this tension between delight and disdain for the local church.

Fred even chuckled, "The church is both my friend and tormentor."

The other pastors urged him to journal one or two insights or "proverbs" that could be carried with him beyond the current letter; and they promised to pray for him

while the church elders processed this latest departure. Two pastors promised to stay in touch during the next week and urged him to process this with the church Board.

The Sources for Theological Reflection

Fred and his colleagues participated in an ancient practice: friends helping friends to interpret life and ministry. The early church Fathers encouraged the discipline of Directors guiding Novices, and Abbots mentoring Brothers for the purpose of reflecting upon the truths of God and the realities of life. Much later, Schleirmacher encouraged reflection upon the words and deeds of the church. To step back in life compels the pastor to "…think about the meaning of these matters with some critical distance before again jumping into action." [1] More recently, this activity has developed into a more intentional discipline called *theological reflection*, or simply TR.

Two broad streams of learning theory converged to create TR: Adult Experiential Learning and Theological Education. The former, experiential learning, emerged in the writings of John Dewey (1859-1952), one of the most significant and controversial educators in the early twentieth century. His educational progressivism challenged the authoritarian educational structures with their teachers who ladled out unquestioned truth and demanded schools who invited the student to mine truths from their own experiences, even if their conclusions challenged the prevailing assumptions of their teachers. Later adult educationalists (e.g. Kolb, 1982), outlined a pattern for adult oriented reflection, and argued that the adult learner assimilates useful information into a personal experience bank; then later, other events are compared with this bank and new principles emerge. Kolb offered a model that captured how adults process experiences and learn through a careful discernment process. The process begins with an experience then moves, ideally, through various stages to provide a new insight and learned experience.

Undoubtedly, life's experiences, be they exhilarating or troubling, play a vital role in adult reflection, but how we process these events varies considerably with each person and culture. From young adults (Parks, 2000, 139f.) to more seasoned business and industrial leaders (Conger and Benjamin, 1999.), adults tend to reflect upon life in similar patterns.

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[1] I thank my colleague, Dr. Archie Spencer for this insight into Schleirmacher as cited in J.O. Duke's Christian Caring Selections from Pastoral Theology (Fortress Press, 1996), 81-85.
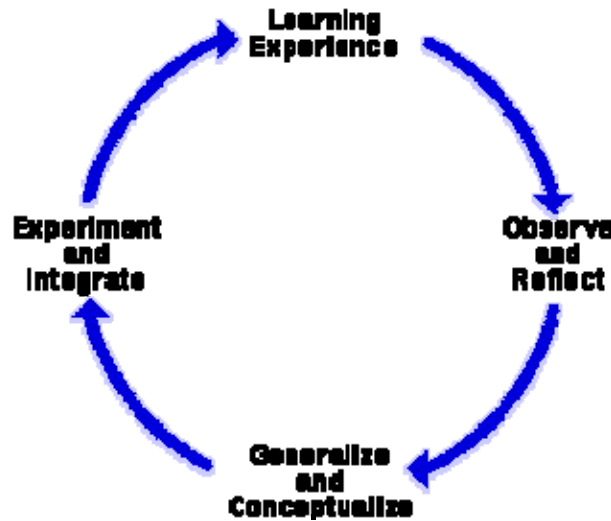
Ideally, the process begins with an emotionally charged experience (good or bad), after which the adult will relive the event, assess her/his emotional response; and then move towards some attempt at a truth to be derived. Sadly, the process sometimes concludes with an already entrenched, even bitter conviction; but at other times brings forth a fresh and candid awareness of life. Sadly, adults often form a set of values without careful, intentional discernment (Mezirow, 1985, 21) or become stuck in one facet of the circle.

Although Kolb viewed these learning steps as a continuum to move through, most people tend to camp in one preferred stage. Some people like to reflect and mull ideas over endlessly, while others tend to make quick or even impulsive decisions. Ideally though, like Fred and his friends, the individual moves through the various facets on the way to more reasoned conclusions.

Theological Education and Reflection

The second major river leading to theological reflection is theological education; a source at times filled with swirling rapids. Toward the end of the twentieth century, seminary education came under fire for what Edward Farley (1983) called the clerical paradigm—a rather cold and academic school which overlooked the soul of the student. Partially due to this dissatisfaction with prevailing seminary education, theological reflection emerged, first among Catholics in the 1970's and later among a broader constituency, as a method for equipping ministers for lifelong, adaptable ministry skills.

Avery Dulles, one of the architects of Vatican II and one of the first to describe the TR process, offered that the new discipline included several critical components:

1. Theological reflection focuses not primarily on the doctrinal themes of traditional theology, but great human problems of the day: war, personal crisis, oppression, poverty, pollution and the breakdown of human community on various levels.

2. The process assumes that, "Revelation is to be found not so much in clear directives from the past as in our own experience. God's revelation to our predecessors affords paradigms or guidelines for the present; they serve to suggest and open up the depth-dimensions in the experience of the believer today. In this sense, one may speak of `continuing revelation'" (p. 117).

3. Such reflection is ideally achieved by a community of diverse individuals who constitute an authentic group with common language, openness, and trust, all sincerely committed to the gospel. They often share a common faith tradition.

4. Theology does not replace the indispensable role of the secular specializations when considering questions like world population, nuclear warfare, or international economic exploitation. "But after the specialist has had his say, there still remain questions of ultimate value that are properly theological in scope. They concern the order of justice and charity, the nature and destiny of man" (Dulles, 1991, 116).

Dulles' conviction that dogmatic beliefs come to us in time-bound formulations (Dulles 1991, 178), provided the foundation for Thomas Groome's later work when he offered one of the first comprehensive treatments of theological reflection (Groome, 1980). Building upon a wide array of theologians and social activists like Marx, Friere and James Michael Lee, Groome explored praxis (his synonym for theological reflection) as a reflective discipline drawing upon personal and corporate experience in which, "…the share praxis approach insists that the Story of the Faith Community be constantly remembered. *But, he added, '…it certainly cannot be imposed upon the present as the final word'"* (Groome 1980, 176, italics added).

For him, praxis was a, "group of Christians dialoguing about their critical reflection upon present events in light of the Christian story" (Groome 1980, 168). Our personal experiences form a part of the Christian tradition, alongside those of the people of God through all generations, beginning with the Biblical communities. Together, we form this long parade of seekers who experience the Person and work of God through our

corporate and personal stories; yet in this process, the stories of Biblical characters have little or no authority over our own. We all share in the ongoing search for truth and revelation.

It must be added that theological reflection, or praxis, represents far more than increased adeptness at theological analysis, or ministerial skill and it moves beyond theological debate about doctrine or denominational polity. Unlike theological analysis, in which the parts of a theological argument are taken apart, its sources identified, and its philosophical or ethical implications spelled out; theological reflection draws upon life; and in so doing, leads the practitioner into a deeper relationship with God and the work of ministry.

The sheer volume of information on TR is impressive; and, a simple google search for the phrase, theological reflection, resulted in over 600,000 sites that noted some reference to the subject. However, as we will discover, the student will also feel amazement at so much confusion, "…this enormous production of literature has not led to a clear insight into the essence and aims of theological reflection and has perhaps raised the level of confusion" (van der Ven 1998, 210).

Adult Learning

This brief history of the origins for theological reflection may cloud the simple truth: Pastors, like all adults, reflect upon life's events in order to take stock of the emotional baggage collected along the way. They continuously make meaning of the world through experiences- What happens once, they expect to happen again. When something emotionally charged happens, they wonder, "What happened here?" and "How did I come to think this way?" and "Why is this important?" Both disaster and delight remain the grist for helping adult learners to engage in meaningful reflection; because these occasions allow, even force us, to reinterpret and reframe our assumptions about life (Brookfield 1992, 14-18).

Furthermore, given that we are social creatures, we most likely discuss this process with trusted friends, at least we should. Ideas and evidence from others help us to hone our own convictions in light of new experiences.

Approaches and Definitions of Theological Reflection

Among the many definitions for this discipline, the most popular seems to be that of, James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, "The process of bringing to bear in the practical decisions of ministry the resources of Christian faith" (Whitehead and Whitehead 1995, 45). Their model, like most others, draws upon at least three distinct sources that speak into the process: tradition, current cultural setting; and, most significantly, personal experience. For them, "Revelation, God's self disclosure that surprises us and overturns our certitudes and transcends our best imagining, *is registered in experience*" (45, italics mine). This process leads to a specific action plan that responds to the critical incident that prompt the original reflection.

A similar pragmatic approach comes from van der Ven who described theological reflection as "…offering a way of deepening our understanding of *the practice of ministry*" (Van der Ven 1998, 137- italics mine). Paulo Friere, living in the volatile world of Central and South America, described the process as the "…restless, impatient, continuing and hopeful inquiry of men in the world, with the world and with each other for the purpose of *transforming the world*." He urged the beleaguered people of South American cultures to grab hold of their personal oppressive experiences, learn from these and rise together to form a new culture.

However, several more radical definitions come from other segments of inquiry, including liberation, black and feminist theologies. These approaches seek to develop an advocacy theology, birthed in experience, by which injustice can be corrected and social wrongs addressed. In these approaches, the prophetic voice of personal experience challenges and even seeks to overthrow the authority of tradition and Scripture (Kinast 2000, 27f.). Personal crisis triggers theological reflection, which in turn inspires revolution

Killen and de Beer offered a more general definition of the entire discussion:

> Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage…it respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living (Killen and de Beer 1994, viii).

Throughout these definitions, this new truth often comes with considerable mistrust of religious dogmatism. For example, Killen and de Beer questioned the reliance upon certitude, an apparent unwillingness to allow personal experience to dialogue or even challenge the assumptions of tradition.

> The standpoint of certitude prevails when Christians accept the Bible or official church teaching literally as God's Word, providing an absolutely clear set of directions for life. In this case we blindly accept the rules, truths or general principles…. (Killen and de Beer 1994, 24)

However, a more intentionally Biblically nuanced definition comes from Warren, Murray and Best:

> Theological reflection is a self-conscious, intentional act in which one seeks to know God and be known by God so that one can love God and others as God loves. It is theological because it consciously relates the divine to the human in a way that makes transformation into wholeness possible. (Warren, Murray et al 2002, 324)

Evangelical Response to the Process

How should evangelicals engage in this discussion? Because of the seemingly inherent suspicion of Biblical authority, evangelicals have remained leery of the entire process, whether described as theological reflection or praxis. Some evangelicals appear to have simply used one of the existing models with little thought to the underlying assumptions. And then others seem to have spiritualized their thought processes assuming that they have discerned God's voice, all the while overlooking the reality that, as adults, we have certain preferred styles of thought processes that have little to do with theology and much to do with personality and culture. We propose here several underlying distinctive assumptions for evangelical pastors and church leaders to consider while seeking to engage in meaningful theological reflection.

(1) Evangelical theological reflection takes place in the context of authentic community.

Here, evangelicals agree with the broader literature. Attempting TR in the monastic world of isolation can lead to faulty thinking; and ministers who rely solely upon their books and personal intuition mature slowly, if at all. Without interaction with

others, they tend to remain entrenched in their narrow often dogmatic worlds. Pastor Fred wisely entrusted his experience to his support group, because he knew mere self assessment lacks the perspective needed to interpret the raw moments of life. In the presence of many friends, there is wisdom.

An authentic community is a group of people who share together in grace and truth, sometimes confronting and challenging, while at other times affirming and applauding each person's assessment of their incidents of church life. Such communities include not only the immediate context (fellow pastor or students, colleagues or denominational leaders), but also the broad historic community of the church through the centuries, all living under the authority of God's Word. An authentic community genuinely longs to see each person become all that God intends them to be in Christ; and furthermore, embedded within these communities will be mentors who provide more than casual feedback. Thomas Rainer noted that seven out of ten clergy responded that the most significant factor in their personal ministerial development was the wisdom of mentors (Rainer 2001, 178).

Several limitations of this kind of community need stressing. First, not only does the group consist of the face to face, but also the wisdom collected formally or informally by the group. Denominations, church clusters, and social science provide the insights from the community that guide the minister through the assessment of personal experiences. Second, the broader church community will always remain cautious of simplistic generalizations across denominational, cultural and international lines. "Here is how we dealt with that issue, thus it should work for you too." Third, and perhaps most significantly, in some domains of theological reflection, the actual dialogue in community acquires an inherent self-authority. Granted, sometimes a community's processing can result in good synergistic thinking; but, conversely what some have called, group think, a self limiting inability may limit the groups ability to see over the fences of collective personal convictions. Kinast noted this concern, when he spoke of the inherent tendency to "…rely on confidence in the process itself" (Kinast 2000, 68,).

(2) Evangelical theological reflection stands upon certainty in the knowledge of a Holy God as revealed in Scripture, yet the profound mystery of His will and work.

Evangelical reflection begins with a deep reverence for God and His revealed Word. Proverbs 1:7 provides the foundation, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." True knowledge assumes that the believer has a humble awareness of the inherent complexity of ministry; yet, at the same time a firm confidence in the Scriptures.

Unfortunately, the current discussion in theological reflection has blurred the distinction between tradition and text, between revelation and discernment, between the meta-narrative of Scripture and the narrative of our own lives. Evangelicals clearly distinguish between the Biblical text and the much longer, more complex historical theological traditions that seek to apply the Biblical texts in ministry context. Historical theology represents tradition, while the Scriptures come as revelation.

History does remain the chief medium of revelation, this is bedrock to Biblical truth; but, the God of Israel ensured that His people did not superimpose their own misguided, personal explanations on events, no matter how sincere their intentions. Yahweh first revealed Himself through covenants with Moses, David and others; and then vindicated His revealed truth through events. With the Law as a reference point, the prophets perpetually turned the people back to God's self-revelation in order to interpret life's ongoing experiences. In essence, God spoke first through revelation; then later, acted in the meta-narrative of Biblical history to corroborate His self revelation. Living under the authority of this revealed Word, Christians critique their lives and experiences under Scripture. "These events have been written for our understanding" (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Evangelicals, therefore, press for an eternal authority outside personal experience or community story sharing: All spiritual truth originates in God and is revealed to humanity through the written Word and the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

Admittedly, evangelicals have been correctly accused of sometimes retreating into dogmatic convictions that no longer carry validity; and these hermeneutically biased opinions must be distilled from true Revelation. Nothing works like raw experience to provide a pristine opportunity to revisit our preconceived notions in light of God's revelation, but always under the light of its authority.

(3) Evangelical theological reflection embraces the sovereignty of God in the experiences of life and their ensuing role in a deepened awareness of God. Crisis often produces vulnerability and openness to new insights.

The Christian life remains a divinely ordained series of events used by God for our spiritual growth and this echoes the Scriptures which record the experiences of people as they grappled with their understanding of God. In fact, for some, these experiences dramatically altered their understanding of God: the crossing of the Red Sea, the Babylonian Captivity, Peter's encounter with the Risen Lord and the explosive coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Job's painful, prolonged experience spoke for many when he admitted, "My ears have heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:3). Saul's encounter with Christ on the road altered his life and theology leading him to abandon his passion to persecute to become its primary champion.

Social science affirms this richness of experiences. When adults learn well from their lives, the results are lasting, their thinking often permanently altered. For pastors, this reflection can result in deeper and more lasting principles for ministry. Although these principles can be discovered at conferences and workshops, they are more likely learned in the ebb and flow of church life. Crisis moments tend to be the most fruitful.

'Yada', a vital Hebrew term, describes this integration of life. Through experience, Adam knew his wife, friends discovered each other through experience (Ps 31:11ff; 55:13 ff) and even God had a deeper knowledge or commitment to His people through experience (Hosea 11:3 ff). By dispensing righteousness, the wise man knows God in a deeper manner (Jeremiah 22:15-16). Paul urged people to present their bodies a living sacrifice "holy and acceptable unto the Lord…that they might prove (discover or know) what is the perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). Even Jesus learned obedience through the suffering of the cross (Hebrew 5:8).

Often, the most profound ministry principles dawn upon us in the crucibles of life. In a study of church leaders, Tom Rainer (2001) asked, "What factors were the most significant in your ministry learning process?" The greatest factor was "successful experiences" (72% either "strongest" or a "strong factor") and the third most prominent were the failures in ministry (57% either "greatest" or "great"). One is reminded of Paul's passion to know Him, both the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering; thus representing both the great God-given successes and the equally God-

ordered trials of ministry. But, true learning cannot be coerced. God allows the minister to choose between careful reflection or mindless repetition of dogmatic practices. The Old Testament often tells the disheartening stories of people who refused to advance their growth through their experiences and found themselves wandering in the wilderness. Discernment of truth must be married to obedient faith.

However, one must caution against imputing too strong a theological meaning on the events of life. Even Robert Kinast, one of the most insightful writers on theological reflection, noted that experience itself is not inherently theological; and therefore, needs some external source of doctrine or belief with which to assess its interpretation. "Advocates of theological reflection must continue to make this clear lest theological reflection be falsely accused of promoting a subjectivist, relativistic approach to Christian faith" (Kinast 2000, 67).

(4) Evangelical theological reflection would agree with the essential need for a careful and accurate and clear recounting of the event(s) in consideration.

Effective theological reflection embraces the vital role of the Biblical community in candidly retelling the events of life and ministry. "Is that really what happened?" Re-telling the event with as dispassionate a story as possible enables the group to interact with the most value. And the Scriptures record numerous such candid retellings. For example, historical books like Kings and Chronicles recount the events of God's people, where instead of distorting the account with grand victories and no defeats, the Old Testament writers told the events as they really happened, with all the failures and sins. This inspired record revealed the critique of God at every battlefield and conversation, thus enabling the people to reflect upon their return to the land.

As we will note in the process below, the first stage of critical thinking asks honest questions. It presses for the facts, and just the facts. "What happened?", "Where did it happen?", and "How did you respond and feel?" are vital in the early stage. "Why it happened?" or any attempt at interpretation, comes later.

(5) A distinctive of evangelical theological reflection is the prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit in the process, a component often missing from other literature on the subject.

The central role of the Holy Spirit remains axiomatic in good evangelical reflection. Before returning to heaven, Jesus promised His followers the presence of the Spirit of Truth, "Who will be with you and in you" (John 14:17); and later He assured the disciples that, when the Spirit comes "…he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12). This process of reflecting upon the events of life emerges in a prayerful, quiet dependence upon the Holy Spirit who works collectively through the community as well as discreetly within each believer. His role in convicting, enlightening and eventual empowering for action redeems the minister from a suffocating, self centered agenda. The presence of the Holy Spirit enables the person to move beyond the mental exercise of cognitive reflection into an embracing of faithful obedience to the truths of God's Word. Discernment is one vital aspect, but appropriate response quite another.

(6) Evangelical theological reflection lives with the tension between the dialectically opposed coming kingdom and the present reality of this world.

There will always be mountain top and valley experiences for which we have limited explanation, therefore pastors want to learn from the events of life without being trapped by an endless meditation upon the meaning. There is a time to simply move on in life without complete answers for what has happened, and theological reflection calls for a discernment that knows when to stop and learn; and conversely when to press on with the work of the kingdom without complete answers. Frankly, busy church leaders have little time to ponder the significance of many events in ministry, except for the precious and carefully chosen few critical incidents that catch their breath.

However, in the successes and failures of church life, sometimes emotions are either stifled and ignored; or conversely allowed to dominate the pastor's mindset. Evangelicals would affirm that the emotionally charged event, the heart of the matter as Killen and de Beers describe it, becomes a vital learning moment. While evangelicals continually long for a better world, like other movements within theological reflection, such pastors admit the ideal and complete kingdom is always future. This world, while somewhat redeemable, is destined for fire. The return of Christ will be a Day of

Judgment, but it will also provide a Day of Final Reflections about what really happened in ministry.

(7) Since evangelicals believe that reflection does not always lead to appropriate action, each adult takes responsibility for the repentance, heart change, and action response that must accompany reflecting upon an experience.

The temptation might be to blame others or the circumstance rather than accept my role in the situation. Conversely, sometimes the tendency is to mull endlessly over the situation and be paralyzed by a fearful unwillingness to act accordingly. The Holy Spirit both enables the pastor to think and obey the revealed will of God for any situation.

A working definition of evangelical theological reflection then is, *"the lifelong, restless, yet Spirit guided exploration of selected personal and ministry experiences for the purposes of both discerning God's character/plans and discovering wise ministry principles. This learning experience takes place within an authentic Biblical community; yet, under the authority of the Scriptures."*

Conclusion

Effective Christ-centered leaders reflect intentionally and prayerfully upon selected experiences of spiritual life. They willingly risk that which is most precious (i.e. entrenched notions about reality), for an even greater discovery of wisdom. Although such insight may emerge in the workshops and seminars of church ministry, more often insight surfaces in the unexpected moments of church life.

The writer of Proverbs compared this reflective process to mining for gold, or crying out for insight. Like gold, ministerial principles do not appear without hard spadework; and yet, a well conceived process of theological reflection, grounded in Scripture and surrounded by authentic community, can greatly enhance one's understanding of current reality, as we seek for those principles of ministry in an unprincipled world.

Time was up, for Fred and his colleagues. Cell phones began to ring, daytimers started appearing and various schedules called people back to the pragmatics of ministry. After scheduling the next meeting and praying together, everyone left with the assurance that conversations would continue with Fred or any of the other participants who needed

a place to reflect upon ministry. After all, ministry worthy of our time is also ministry worthy of ongoing, intentional reflection.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you personally think through the issues of ministry? How reliable is your own reflection process?

2. In what ways do you sense theological reflection is a restless process?

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Joining and Belonging: Toward Church Membership as Sharing in Mission
By Steve Wimmer

Abstract. Potential new members of a congregation often bring assumptions about joining and belonging that are alien to the congregation's purposes. Two such assumptions are: *the consumerism assumption*, which asserts that the individual should get her needs met *as she understands them,* and *the honeymoon assumption,* which holds that when the right people are together, relationships are essentially harmonious. By contrast, the church is called to be a community of transformation and a fellowship of reconciliation. Wise leaders continually work toward clarity about the congregation's purposes and challenge new members to be accountable to them.

"Pastor, I'd like to learn how I can become a member of your church."

These words are music to the ears of most pastors and lay leaders. They indicate the interest of a new potential member, another lamb to welcome into the flock. Since all congregations share in the mission to "make disciples of all nations," it can hardly be thought otherwise that welcoming a new member into the community of faith is good news.

Apart from the *mechanics* of joining a congregation, however, the matter of becoming part of a church is complicated. Congregations are not simple mechanical systems in which new parts are fused onto the old in functional ways. Often, potential new members bring unspoken expectations to the congregation that influence the process of joining, and every congregation has its hidden lives, those beneath the surface factors such as congregational lifespan, size, spirituality styles and congregational identity[1] that profoundly influence how a congregation *works*, including its ways of welcoming new members. The complex of new members' expectations and the hidden lives of congregations helps to explain why, for example, many a new member has had the experience of going through an official process of joining a church, only to be frustrated, even years later, when they still don't feel as though they belong, or why some

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[1] I am indebted to Israel Galindo for this understanding of the hidden lives of congregations. See Israel Galindo. 2004. *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*. Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute.

congregations remain unclear about what precisely can or should be expected of the new member.

This essay considers the process in which a person comes to belong in the context of congregation. My interest here is not in the details of this process. Every congregation will find it necessary to clarify its journey of joining. Included in this journey will necessarily be the finding ways to help potential new members become relationally connected with other members of the congregation. The focus here, however, is not so much in the relational aspects of joining as in thinking about how new members become connected to the *mission* of the congregation. It is my belief that congregations have not succeeded in helping persons join the church until those new members are given, imperfectly to be sure, to the purposes for which the congregation exists.

First, two assumptions apply here, assumptions that are present within the North American context that mitigate *against* the sort of joining in which the new members give themselves to the mission of the congregation. Second, leaders play crucial roles in addressing these assumptions and in influencing the manner in which members embrace their roles as servants of the congregation's purposes.

Assumptions That Influence Ways of Joining and Belonging

Every potential or existing member brings to the congregation assumptions from the broader cultural context that influence ways of joining and belonging to a congregation. Assumptions are our often unconscious, un-reflected expectations and beliefs, our *beneath the surface* ways of seeing things. Two significant assumptions at work in the North-American context that influence the practice of joining and belonging to congregations are: 1) the consumer assumption, and 2) the honeymoon assumption.

The Consumer Assumption

I recently observed a visitor to the congregation I serve who was carrying on a conversation with a hostess at the welcome center. He was asking many questions and she was doing her best to answer them. He took a church communication card, a simple instrument we use to help visitors make connections with various ministries of the church, and began to fill it out. When I read the card the next day, I observed that he had requested information about many of the church's ministries and that he had written, in

large, block letters, "Respond to me quickly." Concerned that there may be an urgent need, I called him as soon as I was able. What I discovered quickly, however, was that he did not have a critical need, but that he wanted information about the congregation's ministries, including information about what those ministries could do for him, and he wanted it now!

Rick Barger has suggested that we can be almost certain about one thing regarding people who enter a congregation: "They will enter the church from the posture of being a consumer." He continues:

> The point here is that they have deep perceived spiritual and personal needs, and they are determined to get their needs met. If they do not, they are going to go someplace else. They are going to have it their way. And it seems that there are an infinite number of choices. After all, if you can go into Starbucks and choose from countless permutations and combinations on how to have a cup of coffee, why can't you do the same thing when it comes to being affiliated with a faith community?[2]

Like the visitor to our congregation, many church consumers bring the same assumption to church that they bring to Wal-Mart or Starbucks or McDonalds, an assumption that says, in effect, "I know what I want and I've come to see if you will provide it."

Consumerism in the United States may be traced to a period of history known as the Roaring 20's. Following World War I, many middle class Americans began to enjoy disposable income for the first time, enabling a broad swath of Americans to make purchases for pleasure. Large department stores emerged to meet the demands of the growing class of consumers. Consumers and the manufacturing and sales industries became knit together in a complex, systemic mutuality in which the operative principle stated that the consumer determines how they get their wants and needs met and the providers of goods must, if they wish to be successful, grant what the consumers demand.

The consumer assumption is so deeply ingrained in the culture of 21st century North-America that unless leaders are working toward clarity about their mission, and are disciplined about its practice, consumerism will be a decisive factor in how people join and continue to belong to congregations. Where the consumer assumption is allowed to

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[2] Rick Barger. 2005. *A New and Right Spirit, Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture*. Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 12-13.

rule, new and existing members expect their congregations to meet their religious needs as they, the consumers, understand those needs. This places enormous pressures on congregational leaders to conform to consumers' demands. Programming must keep pace with their wants, worship must bend to their aesthetic tastes, caregiving ministries must address their needs as they understand those needs.

When a consumer chooses to join a congregation because it meets her perceived needs, the assumption of consumerism is likely to control how she continues to participate in the life of the congregation. One indicator of this assumption may be evident in the congregation's care-giving ministries. Because congregations are supposed to be places where people are cared for, those who come to a congregation steeped in the consumer assumption may demand to be care-receivers. They may work the system, often in manipulative ways, to recruit people, often pastors or other leaders, to provide the care they demand. They may see the command of Jesus to love one another through a window rather than through a mirror, so that it describes what others should do for them rather than what they should do for others. They may participate in a long list of services provided by the congregation, including small groups, support groups, counseling ministries and pastoral care and visitation, assessing their participation in these services on the singular criterion of whether or not it meets their needs as they understand them.

Pastors and other leaders who bend to this demand become care-givers in response to care-demanders. The task of equipping the saints is set aside in favor of attending to their burdens. In such a case, it might be argued that those demanding care have in fact become the leaders of the church.

The practice of consumerism in congregations has troubling implications for the church's mission of service in the world. Where consumerism reigns, congregations must construct their ministries in an effort to attract and keep members. Distinctively Christian practices such as hospitality, where the stranger is welcomed into the missional life of the church, and koinonia, where disparate people are united through Jesus Christ, are replaced by uniquely consumerist practices such as niche marketing schemes and like-minded fellowship. In such a setting, congregations may grow, but one must wonder if it is at the expense of the kingdom of God.

The Honeymoon Assumption

In a recent movie, Robin Williams plays the part of a pastor who specializes in helping couples prepare for marriage. Central to his task is helping couples realize that marriage will be more difficult than they imagine, so he devises a number of humorous schemes that cause them to encounter conflict. The storyline seems to suggest that it is only as couples engage in healthy conflict that they are prepared for marriage.

License to Wed is a refreshing contrast to a dissimilar story that is told in many and various ways, a story in which boy meets girl, the two fall in love, they overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges, and the couple go on to live happily every after. This honeymoon story, where true love is possible when the right Cinderella comes together with the right Prince Charming, is told in so many ways and with such emotive force in oral tradition, literature, and the movies, that one cannot help but suspect that it has a primal quality.

The honeymoon story brings to expression a powerful assumption about relationships: when the right people are together, relationships should be essentially harmonious. When it is present in congregations, the honeymoon assumption says that harmony, understood as the presence of unity and the absence of conflict, should be the church's default setting. Relationships in the congregation will therefore be comfortable, rewarding, and relatively easy. We shouldn't have to deal with very much conflict, and when we do it will be easy to detect who is at fault. In fact, the presence of ongoing and persistent conflict is surely a sign that the congregation is flawed.

Church visitors and members who have unwittingly embraced the honeymoon assumption may gravitate toward the beautiful narrative of Acts 2, where we are told that the first generation of Christians were together under the influence of the Spirit, that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship and the breaking of bread and prayer and they had all things in common. Where that story is read through the lenses of the honeymoon assumption, it seems to reinforce the idea that harmony is the default setting for the church, overlooking the ardency of conflict in the early church, even in several episodes of Luke's narrative in Acts.

The honeymoon assumption is a significant challenge to a congregation and its practice of welcoming new members. Where the assumption is operative, some potential members (not to mention old-timers) may go shopping for a different congregation the

moment conflict emerges, disappointed that the church doesn't live up to its promise to be a network of loving relationships, no doubt whispering on the way out that "these people are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites." The congregation that operates by the honeymoon assumption may retreat into a religious ghetto, imagining that the community of faith is a community of like-mindedness, avoiding conflict at all costs. Here, keeping the peace, passive-aggressive behavior and pretentious fellowship may undermine efforts to move toward more genuinely Christian ways of joining and belonging.

Long range congregational indicators reveal that the consumer and honeymoon assumptions undermine the process in which new members come to share in the mission of the congregation. The consumer assumption continually turns the mission of the church back on the consumer, so that he may benefit from its ministries as long as they continue to meet his perceived needs. The consumer is in charge. The honeymoon assumption predisposes the potential new member to find a congregation where harmony is present as the default setting. Efforts to keep the peace are likely to replace more challenging efforts to become a community of reconciliation.

The Role of Leaders

The role of leaders as equippers is crucial to the congregation that practices faithful joining and belonging. When I speak of leaders, I mean the pastoral and lay leaders who serve the congregation in its formal leadership team. Because of its place in the congregational system, the leadership team has a crucial role in the process of joining and belonging. Borrowing from Peter Steinke, I propose that leaders must function as the *immune system*[3] of the congregation. The purpose of the body's immune system is to differentiate what is *self* from what is *not self*, and to destroy alien invaders to the body. When viruses and other unwelcome agents enter the body, the immune system detects them and unleashes a variety of mechanisms to fight them off. Without a healthy immune system, the body will simply not survive. Similarly, in the congregational body, leaders must rigorously work to define the *self*, the mission of the congregation, and rigorously address those ideas, practices and assumptions that would undermine it. This

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[3] Peter Steinke. 1996. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach.* Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 90-99.

understanding of leadership implies two vital practices: 1) obsessing[4] about the mission of the congregation and 2) holding the congregation accountable to its mission.

Obsessing About the Mission of the Congregation

If congregations are to practice ways of joining and belonging that are faithful to the gospel, leaders must continually focus upon the mission for which the congregation exists. The word *continually* must be emphasized. It is not unusual today for congregations to write mission, core value, and vision statements. Unfortunately, the process of working toward clarity of purpose is often regarded as a task to be completed and checked off the to-do list. A congregation uses one of a variety of methods to discern its purpose, and then sets the work aside. The finished product is likely to be little more that window dressing, while assumptions that contradict the mission (such as the two assumptions previously described) continue to have a negative influence on the course of the church.

Leaders must *continually* obsess about the mission of the congregation. In so doing, leaders learn to distinguish between *self*, who the congregation is when it is true to its mission, and *not self*, the invasive practices, values, and assumptions that would create dysfunction. The work of mission clarification is always the most important function of leaders. This continual obsession about mission will include having an ongoing, living dialogue about the congregation's purpose which may include such acts as writing or reviewing mission, values, and vision statements; studying Scripture together in light of a challenge in the community or in the congregation; reading and discussing theological works that are true to the congregation's tradition and practice; reflecting on and discussing those seasons in the congregation's life when it most faithfully fulfilled its purpose, as well as those occasions when it wandered from it; reflecting on contemporary challenges in culture and community in light of Paul's reflections on *the principalities and powers,* and the list goes on. In the ongoing effort to work toward clarity of mission, prayer will be regarded as a crucial practice of discernment, replacing prayer as a

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[4]Dan Hotchkiss has reviewed the work of non-profit governance specialist John Carver, who contends that the board of a non-profit organization must be obsessed with defining and prescribing the *ends* of the organization. The ends are the basic purposes for which the organization exists. See Don Hotchkiss. 2005. Learning from Non-Profits: How Church Boards Can Benefit From Secular Practices. *Congregations.* The Alban Institute Resources for Congregations, Spring. http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=2286

perfunctory way to begin and end meetings. The point here is that working toward missional clarity is necessary, arduous, and ongoing business.

The process in which leaders continually work toward missional clarity can have a significant impact on ways of joining and belonging to a congregation. Consider how missional clarity might challenge the consumer assumption. Where the consumer assumption is operative, leaders must address the needs of consumers *as they understand them.* Where leaders are clear about the congregation's purpose, however, leaders will challenge potential new members to consider their perceived needs in light of the gospel and the congregation's mission. Suppose, for example, that in the process of obsessing about their mission, leaders have come to believe that the congregation is a *baptismal fellowship*, a community of believers who have been baptized into Christ's death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, they too might live in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). In such a fellowship, it is not the needs of visitors or long-time members *as they understand them* that set the agenda of the church, but the possibility of being made new together through Christ. All decisions, programs, and practices will be filtered through the question: Does this serve our crucifixion with Christ and our resurrection to new life, or is it merely a bending to the demands of the false self? If such a fellowship were to market itself to the world, it might imitate the congregation in New York City that placed an advertisement on the subway that read, "Become a Loser... We'll help you lose your life and build a new one. After all, Jesus Christ lost everything, and he gained the whole world."

It is the task of leaders to continually obsess about the congregation's mission and communicate that mission in the congregation. Where there is clarity of mission, joining and belonging are defined by a process of considering one's needs in light of the mission of the congregation.

Holding the Congregation Accountable

A second practice for leaders who function as the immune system of the church is providing accountability. Leaders continually obsess about the mission of the congregation and hold one another, other leaders and members accountable to that mission. Much as the immune system confronts intrusive viruses, leaders expose

assumptions, attitudes, and practices that invade the congregation and are untrue to the congregation's purpose.

A word of caution is in order. An overly-frenetic or micro-managing practice of accountability is always destructive in a congregation. When the practice of accountability regresses into conducting witch hunts, or when the central leadership group of the church controls most of the decisions of other leadership groups in the name of accountability, the congregation always loses. It is my observation, however, that congregations are more likely to err in the opposite direction, so that holding one another, other leaders and the members of the congregation accountable to the mission of the church is rarely, and sometimes never, practiced by the leaders. Many congregations have developed a culture of niceness, where holding others accountable to the mission of the church is rarely offered, for fear of hurting someone's feelings. Where this is the case, guarding people's feelings has in fact become one of the highest purposes of the church (if not *the* highest!), regardless of what the congregation may *say* its purposes are.

Consider the importance of the practice of accountability in view of the honeymoon assumption and the influence it wields in congregations over our ways of joining. As noted earlier, the honeymoon assumption presupposes that harmony will be the default setting in the congregation where the *right* people are together. Symptoms of the honeymoon assumption holding sway in a congregation may include a revolving door of church shoppers who move from congregation to congregation in search of the right relational fit, or members retreating into pretentious community, where like-mindedness is embraced and conflict is avoided at all costs.

Leaders who serve as the immune system of the church will hold the congregation accountable to its formative story. It is the story of a good creation that is tragically fallen. Within the fallen world, relationships are difficult, sometimes even oppressive, so that now some of God's children rule over others in dehumanizing ways and conflict seems ubiquitous. Nevertheless, this story is the account of God's redeeming love, where God works in history to reconcile a people to God's self and to work God's will and purposes in them. The center of God's reconciling story is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who restores us to a right relationship with God and to one another and empowers us by the Spirit to work out a unity with one another based in God's presence, call, and power. We who are now characters in this story anticipate that day when God's

victory will at last be done on earth as it is in heaven and we will be one people through Christ.

The purpose of this unfairly brief and sketchy retelling of the Biblical narrative is to point out its sharp contrast with the honeymoon narrative and its assumptions. In the Biblical narrative, the goal is not getting the right people together so that they may experience harmony as their default setting, but bringing together disparate people—Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free—through the cross so that they might be working out the unity that is granted by the Spirit. Where the former story assumes harmony as the default setting, the latter assumes the presence of conflict, the decisive work of Christ who has deflated its power, and the calling of a people who are willing to cooperate with the Spirit in order to work through conflict toward unity.

Leaders who lead in the service of God's redemptive story, over against the honeymoon narrative and its assumptions, will hold one another, the congregation and potential new members accountable to be becoming a community of reconciliation. One striking example of this sort of accountability in the New Testament is that of Paul, who publically called out Euodia and Syntyche to work out their unity in the Lord (Philippians 4:2). While this practice of public accountability may seem a bit strong for our ears, it draws attention to the vital importance of the practice of accountability in a congregation that would perform joining and belonging in ways that are faithful to the good news.

A Community of Transformation

In the spring of 1994, my wife and participated in the worship of an English speaking congregation that met in a decrepit building not far from the city center of Cairo, Egypt. The worship leader offered this request during the congregational prayer: "Lord, help us to find those whom you are making new and join our lives to the work you are doing among them." I was astonished by the wisdom of his prayer. As I understood him, he was praying that we might have the discernment to find and be part of a transformational community of faith, where men, women, and children are becoming a new creation, so that we also might experience transformation. I could not help but wonder what might happen if church shoppers were to make evidence of renewal a top criterion in their hunt for a new church, so that they, too, might be made new, or if church

members were to understand their fellowship as a transformational community that is open to others seeking transformation.

Wise leaders will continually work toward clarity about the purposes of the congregation. They will hold one another, other leaders, the congregation as a whole, and potential new members accountable to those purposes. They will recognize that the process of welcoming new members includes providing care *and* challenge, so that new members will understand that they are entering a baptismal community, a place of death and resurrection, a community of renewal to which they can join their lives. Wise leaders will challenge potential new members with a clear vision of who the congregation is becoming, included in which will be a vision of people who are reconciled to God and to one another through Jesus so that they might work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

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Equipping Leadership: Preparing God's People for Personal, Congregational, and Community Transformation

By Elizabeth A. Wourms

Abstract. Present and future contours of congregational life and mission appear to have a strong correlation with the degree to which current church leaders give intentional effort to preparing God's people for works of service in the many arenas of God's reign. This essay focuses on congregational aspects of leadership equipping within the context of a moment of inspiration and challenge alongside an ocean coastline.

The church has a God-given call to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20); a Christian leader has a God-given call to equip all God's people to live out their giftedness in ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). An equipping leader is one who embodies this biblical calling presented in Ephesians—the call to be an equipper of God's people. From a purely practical standpoint, *equip* may be characterized as follows: *to act as a catalyst to release potential within other persons, in order that they discover their God-given gifts and passions, develop capacity to own and live a vision, and become whole persons*.[1] The Creator has placed great potential in each person through unique design and giftedness. Leaders enjoy the rare privilege of recognizing that potential in themselves and others, and of nurturing it toward full expression.

Equipping leaders serve in a variety of ministry contexts, from local churches to parachurch organizations, consulting practices, church agencies or judicatories, mission fields, and other types of non-profit organizations. For the purposes of this essay, the local congregation is the context for equipping ministry.

An equipping church is simply one in which the pastors and the people are partners in ministry. The whole People of God lead and serve together, valuing and affirming one another's unique contributions. In an equipping church, leaders recognize

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[1] Original definition developed by the author and her colleague, Rev. Dr. Christopher Hardy. We understand this conceptualization of equipping as a *vision* to pursue, rather than as a definition in the purest sense of the term.

serving in ministry as an aspect of *discipleship*. The goal of preparing people for ministry and connecting them to service opportunities is personal growth and development in faith.

An equipping church is one that embodies core values of prayer, the priesthood of believers, servant leadership, team ministry, intentionality, and a proactive response to change.[2] The equipping church recognizes the centrality of prayer in the life of the congregation and the necessity of prayer to discern God's vision, leadership, and plan for the church, and for developing a unique equipping model for each specific congregation. In lifting up the priesthood of believers, an equipping church recognizes that all members in the Body of Christ are gifted and called into ministry, and are collectively a *kingdom of priests* (Rev. 1:6). The church embraces people holistically in the discovery of gifts, needs, and God's calling. The church equips people for ministry in the family, the church, the community, and the world.

Leaders in equipping churches model servanthood when they demonstrate humility, authenticity, accountability, and genuine care of people. Servant-leaders embrace the privilege of giving ministry away as they equip those within their sphere of influence. Service is understood and embodied as equipping others to do ministry, rather than doing it all for them. The team ministry value is lived out as healthy teams form. A *ministry team* is "a small group of people (2-12) called together by God, who covenant to care for one another, while using their diverse gifts to pursue a vision."[3]

An equipping church intentionally builds church-wide systems for administrative, strategic, and prayer support; trains leaders to identify people's gifts and ministry needs; connects people into service opportunities according to their gifts; equips them for specific ministry roles; focuses on growth and discipleship as a part of service; affirms people for their gifts; and recognizes them for their service. An equipping church has intentional and specific systems and processes in place to *prepare*, *connect*, and *equip* people for ministry.

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[2] The Core Values and contextual elements of an Equipping Church are borrowed with permission from Sue Mallory. This material has been widely shared by Leadership Training Network and is lived out in Equipping Churches all across the United States. Mallory's organization is now part of Group Publishing's *Church Volunteer Central Association*, http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com.

[3] Definition of *team* ©2005 Elizabeth Wourms. Definition adapted with permission from Sue Mallory. It is a modified version of the working definition of *team* used by Leadership Training Network.

An equipping church is a living *organism* rather than strictly an *organization*, and responds creatively and proactively to shifts in culture. The church continually changes its methods, but maintains its integrity in presenting the gospel message.

A metaphor from a recent life experience will be helpful in illustrating this concept of transformational, equipping leadership. Several years ago, as I walked along an ocean shoreline, I heard God's voice calling out from the deep, encouraging me to hear God's heart for the church in this metaphor from the sea.

The sheer power of the ocean overwhelmed me as I walked the craggy shoreline. Not only did I sense the power, but I was also consumed by it—as if I had dived beneath its surface and allowed the water to envelope me. I felt hyper-alive, as if every fiber of my being was electrified with the presence of God and the energy of the Holy Spirit speaking through the power of the sea. I was moved to tears by the sheer awesomeness of the untapped potential and power in this body of water, and I sensed God speaking to my heart, "There is a similar untapped potential and dynamic power latent in the Body of Christ." I realized that the tears filling my soul and eyes were not just emotional up-welling at the beauty of God's creation, but the very tears of God for the church.

Equipping leaders have a profound message to communicate—it involves *potential* and *power*. Their call is to proclaim a word—from the Word of God—that will speak to the church to release God's people to live out their baptismal call to ministry. Our charge as leaders is not to grow and build the church; our charge is to grow and develop God's people. When the focus is on church growth, then we wind up using people as tools and resources—as the means toward an unhealthy end. When the focus is on growing disciples, then leaders utilize the church and its resources as the means to develop healthy, mature people in Christ.

This latent power in the Body of Christ is the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead; the same power of the risen Christ that abides in each person who claims his name and God's saving grace; the same power that moved upon those gathered in the upper room on Pentecost and fell like tongues of fire; the same power that compelled those faithful followers out into the world to spread the Good News; the same power that led thousands of people to be saved daily and the church to expand around the world! The New Testament calls this spiritual power *dynamis* (Acts 1:8). The church sits

on a spiritual keg of dynamite. However, instead of destructive *dynamis*, it will be the power of God to release God's people and fully usher in what Greg Ogden calls the "New Reformation."[4]

On the ocean shore, I saw evidence of this power in the crashing of the waves along the rocky coastline as the tide rolled in, yet I was overwhelmed by the sense that the visible expression of the waves merely whispered to the extent of the power within that body of water. I thought of today's church, and wondered if the evidence of God's Spirit being expressed through my ministry is merely a whisper of the mighty roar yet to be released in service to a lost and needy world as latent potential is released.

The richness of life embodied in the ocean captivated my senses. Although unable to see the abundance of marine life beneath the surface of the waves, I knew it was there—I felt it in the core of me being. I observed some evidence of life in the flora on the rocks along the water's edge and smelled the raw, organic smells of the ocean fauna blowing off the water through the brisk, salty air. Through my physical senses, the ocean spoke of the life contained within its body, and yet I heard its promise that there is so much more to be experienced—so much life teeming beneath its surface. I sensed the ocean lift a finger and beckon—come and sense the power; come taste and see.

The church embodies a richness of life, as well. Christ's abundant life brings salvation, strength and joy for the earthly journey, and life everlasting. But also, a deep well of life, *zoe,* waits to spring up and gush forth with geyser-like potential within the church, and one cannot truly imagine its life-giving power for the people of God. Jesus came to bring life, life in abundance (John 10:10); but the church will not realize the full extent of that life until God's people experience release for authentic, abundant life expressed to its fullness in worship and service. Life exists beneath the surface of the ocean that persons cannot see while standing by its edge; life exists beneath the surface of the church that leaders cannot see until they wade in and immerse themselves in it and call forth its potential.

The church is a family, God's family. God's blessing and abundance come as equipping becomes multi-directional and inter-generational. Equipping ministry begins in the home before it goes anywhere else. Parents enjoy the sacred privilege of being the

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[4] Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

primary equippers of their children. Leaders in Christ's church do well to remember that ministry begins at home. Mentoring occurs on many levels; peer-peer, older-younger, younger-older, clergy-lay, lay-clergy. Transformation flows through a congregation as individual persons awaken to their role as catalysts for another's journey of becoming.

At one point along the journey on the ocean shore, I left the path and made my way down to the edge of the water. I noticed that the small rocks at the tidal edge were all completely worn smooth by the power of the surf. It was a vast array of shapes, sizes, and color—incredible diversity and uniqueness—each one polished smooth, refined and shaped by the Creator's hand. I thought of the uniqueness of each part of the Body of Christ and how rhythmically and beautifully—even musically—we function when each member allows itself to be shaped and polished by the power of the Spirit (Eph. 3:20).

I declared this beach to be a rock-skipper's paradise! A plethora of perfectly flat, smooth stones lay there just begging to be plucked up and sent skimming over the surface of the water. I imagined, in the image of the skipping stones, the lives of many clergy today. In clergy-driven churches, the pastor's frenetic life often becomes like a skipping stone: full of energy and momentum, shooting full force across the surface of the Body of Christ, barely getting wet. I imagined tossing the pastor-pebbles slowly and gently into Christ's Body, allowing them to sink fully into that Body that calls them through their baptism. In such a wondrous immersion, they would realize a God-ordained partnership. All who are baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ—in him there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:26-29). Truly allowing oneself to be engulfed in baptism leads to the life-giving truth that all are one in Christ. Believers are all ministers by virtue of their baptism in Christ. Full immersion into Christ's Body is life-giving! Entering into Christ's life, however, means fully entering into his death, as well. In order to find the abundant life in Christ, one must die a painful death to self. Embodying the ministry of the baptized, the priesthood of believers, necessitates full realization that self-aggrandizement has no place in pastoral leadership. Self-emptying, life-giving ministry requires complete and utter immersion into Christ's death and resurrection. One cannot know the depth of that dying and rising by merely skimming along the surface of Christ's Body.

A congregation's journey of transformation will be one of discovery, revelation, conviction, invitation to brokenness, and a call to restoration. A church's faith journey is not unlike that of individual believers. The congregation collectively explores the brokenness in the church's history, exposes hidden deception beneath the surface, celebrates its life, and renews the call to full expression of the power and potential within the Body of Christ. It is a journey to undertake prayerfully, with openness and vulnerability and with full assurance that God is present. It is that journey in which the congregations serve as catalysts to release potential within other persons, in order that they discover their God-given gifts and passions, develop capacity to own and live a vision, and become whole persons.

My personal journey has been one marked by discovery, revelation, conviction, surrender to an invitation to brokenness, acceptance of grace, and call to healing and restoration. As I have learned how to *be*, rather than *do*, I delight in inviting congregations to discover the freedom to be the church God dreams of, rather than continuing to *do* church in a strictly institutional manner. The transformational journey is one in which the faithful, individually and collectively, pursue God's call together, and in the process *transform their rough places* and live into a liberating future.

This is the way of the prophet, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken'" (Isa. 40:3-5).

About the Author

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Spiritual Disorientation and God's Guidance
By John Ackerman

Abstract. In this article, attention is given to a problem that afflicts many church leaders—spiritual disorientation. Pastors and other leaders can be so busy doing the work that they lose their orientation to God. From experience as a spiritual director, a practice has emerged which seems to be effective not only for church leaders, but also for all members of a congregation.

I met recently with a pastor who had taken a course I taught for pastors in a regional conference. He was interested in my theme that pastors need to develop personal spiritual practices or they will ultimately burn out and suffer from spiritual disorientation. They will lose their capacity to hear the voice of Jesus who says, "My sheep hear my voice." Or, they become the "elder brother" at work in the field; but they feel little joy, and lack the ability to enter God's party.[1] After being a spiritual director for about 30 years, I have found that spiritual disorientation is a constant temptation for many pastors. Eugene Peterson once observed that "Spiritual direction is practiced by pastors in the very context that constantly interferes with the practice. Spiritual direction is the act of paying attention to God" (Peterson 1992, 181).

Four months after the workshop, this pastor called to see me. His spiritual practice had fallen apart. There is nothing that interferes with a relationship with Christ like working for Christ. This pastor needed either one-on-one spiritual direction or a group, or both to be faithful to his practice.

How do other people maintain their orientation to God? A mega-church leader hired researchers who found that church activity seems to make little difference in the spiritual growth of members. He reported that many church leaders are familiar with church growth practices and programs, but not as able to help people in their orientation to God. Pastors need to learn and cultivate the art of discernment. The practice of discernment, in a way that addresses the spiritual disorientation of a congregation, is not simply the introduction of yet another program. Is the answer found in creating more

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[1] A reference to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

small groups? This is problematic in light of Winseman's observation that only 40% of members are willing to participate in them (Winseman 2007, 136).[2] If we were more clear about congregational mission would we see more spiritual growth among the people of God? A mission statement may help the church with outreach; but in my experience it won't produce greater capacity for individual discernment. This interaction of individual and group orientations seems to be a critical factor in helping us to become oriented to God's guidance in a consistent way. This interaction is likely to lead to more tangible outcomes such as being satisfied with life, hospitality, and giving.

It seems that business people often have greater clarity about concepts of organizational development than many church experts. For example, Robert Quinn in *Deep Change* suggests that individuals and organizations either go through deep change or slow death. His notion of "deep change" could be understood as organizational and individual repentance—a concept that church leaders should recognize. Quinn asserts that a key habit for organizations is to listen to the small voice within (Quinn 1996, 203). In my experience, this language from a businessman often speaks to church leaders better than religious language. But the main issue remains: How can we, leaders and members of congregations, listen to the voice of the Spirit?

Steven Covey in his most recent book, *The Eighth Habit* (2004) emphasizes the need to encourage the voices that arise from people in the organization (versus the tendency for many in church organizations to communicate from the top down). He asks organizational leaders and members to consider "What is wildly important?" and "How do you know you're doing it?" This stress on evaluation is echoed in the current requirement for more rigorous outcome studies for charities. What about a similar evaluation for churches? In what ways and to what extent are lives and social conditions being changed through the efforts of congregations?

"Theory U" described by Scharmer (2007) has been proposed by organizational development researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While not a "quick fix" it seems to have led to deep change in a cross section of national and international organizations. The process begins with an open mind, receptive to information. Then, "open heart belonging" is encouraged where people move past

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[2] Joseph Myers in *The Search to Belong* (2003) writes that we need four spaces for belonging: Public, Social, Personal, Intimate. We shouldn't try to move people toward the intimate level, or personal level (small groups) but accept them, as Jesus did, where they are.

thinking individually and begin to get ready for more personal sharing. Finally, the process focuses on the "open will" of the individual and group. In other words, members of the organization are encouraged to surrender or suspend closely held perspectives. Then the members of the organization build on the "hints" that surface. In Christian terms, to "let go, let Spirit, let come" might be one way of describing this part of the process as people are encouraged to relax and, in silence, open themselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The theory also recalls the incarnation in Philippians (descent, death and rising), and the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) slogan: "let go, let God."

Scharmer and others suggest that Theory U is not a special practice to be used at special times to generate corporate discernment. All participants are urged to practice, on a daily basis, letting go and being open to what they term "spirit." Case studies for leaders also show the same pattern. Wow! Not just special technical techniques—but changed leaders! Orientation to the Holy Spirit! Individual and organization together!

I have taught a practice stemming from two different roots. One root is the 10th and 11th step of Alcoholics Anonymous (inventory, prayer, and meditation) which AA members report helps in the transformation of addicts. The other root is the practice of Ignatius of Loyola who taught a twice daily prayer of examination of consciousness, more important for him than Bible reading and the Daily Office. This practice is currently called an *examen*.

Several of us are working on an integration of the *examen* and the steps indicated above from Alcoholics Anonymous. We come from South Africa, Tanzania, and America. The result is not a neat, orderly practice that varies from individual to individual, group to group. Instead of teaching a set practice, we help people fit it to their time and personality—thus making it their own. Here is an outline of one version of the practice that can be used by individuals or groups—especially to sensitize them to social justice:

> **STOP**
> Breathe out, relax.
> Breathe in the Spirit, Love.
>
>
> **LOOK**

What is happening? In me? In the newspaper? In Scripture? (Mind.)
Where is compassion? How can I receive?
To whom do I belong? We belong? (Heart)
Let go, let Spirit come. (Will)

LISTEN
Where is the voice, hunch, intuition that asks me, that invites us?

GO
What is wildly important?
How do you know if we are doing this? We know?

The pastor who came to me is now using this process for his individual daily practice. He has introduced the process to his leadership group who also practice it, and has introduced it to the congregation. He and they seek to be oriented to God regularly.

The process described above can be adapted for individuals. Many meditate or read Scripture. They can also learn to take an inventory of the preceding day while at the same time considering personal, group, and world events. Where does the Spirit speak, call, or beckon? Many times, it is not in the actual time of our practice that the Spirit speaks; but our practice has sensitized us to God's hints through the day.

Members of church leadership groups can ask more frequently: "How is the Spirit evident as we worship? What is God inviting us to do or to be? The pastor I mentioned at the beginning of this article has brought together a weekly sermon preparation group to help him discern evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in congregational worship; and to determine implications for the coming week's worship. The leaders in my congregation regularly reflect on Scripture and listen to how God is using the Holy Spirit to speak to them through the Scripture. They also elicit feedback from the congregation concerning where God is at work in our midst.

During our annual meeting, the children went downstairs and returned bearing pictures about ways in which *they* had experienced God last year—ways in which they had sensed God's inviting. The adults found their pictures much more interesting and inspiring than reading reports and looking at budgets! Now, we adults are being asked about how we desire to grow spiritually.

The social action group in my congregation reports to the congregation and invites the direction of the Spirit in their participation in the pain of the world. We intend to ask our local politicians to tell us where they find the spiritual resources for their

political action. There are many ways of supporting those called to work on ministries of compassion and social justice. There are many ways of discerning where God is calling us individually and together. As you read this story of our congregation, you may identify other ways of helping individuals, leadership, and the congregation as a whole to become oriented to God.

The practice described above is working for many. I believe that it is consistent with Jesus' teaching about prayer: "What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now" (Matthew 6:30-33 *The Message*).

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Intergenerational Worship
By Edward D. Seely

Editor's Note: The following outline serves as an introduction to a larger project in development. Dr. Seely's concern is to help churches understand, and experience intentionally, intergenerational worship. If you wish further information about this project, please contact Ed Seely directly at eds@calvin.edu

Introduction

Many churches face a challenging dilemma: How do we plan worship services that will engage younger people and still meet the needs of those who are older? [1] When a church loses a sense of balance and tilts toward one side or the other, disharmony typically occurs. If the church favors the young and plans services that the youth want (or, more likely, what they <u>think</u> the youth want), many older people often protest. On the other hand, if the church ignores its youth and doesn't include elements in the worship service that they can relate to and connect with, they protest, some even to the point of refusing to attend. To answer these questions, as all others, we turn to God and his Word. How did families worship in the Bible?

Intergenerational Worship in the Bible

1. Ask the participants to form groups of four.

   a. Request that they work first as individuals to examine the following texts. Project the texts (except for the parenthetical content beside them) so all can see, e.g., on a flipchart, chalkboard, overhead projector, or by using a PowerPoint-type program on an LCD projector. Assign each person the study of at least two passages, and ask each to be prepared to explain what the Scriptures mean for including all ages in corporate worship.

      1) Exodus 33:7-11 (Note that in v. 8 "all the people" and in v. 10 "all stood and worshiped" means children were included.)

      2) Leviticus 23:33-44 (See especially vs. 42-43.)

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[1] Recommended reading: Howard Vanderwell (ed). 2008. *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together.* Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute.

3) Numbers 10:1-10 (Observe that in vs. 3, 10 "the whole community" is to be involved, including children.)

4) Deuteronomy 15:19-23 (Note especially v. 20.)

5) Deuteronomy 16:9-17 (See especially vs. 11, 14. Children are to be at the feasts [and at the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days!] that their "joy will be complete" [v. 15].)

6) Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 31 (Observe especially vs. 12, 13.)

7) Psalm 8 (Notice especially v. 2.)

8) Matthew 18:1-6 (cf. Mark 9:35-37; Luke 9:46-47. How do these texts relate to intergenerational worship in the church? Though likely not a worship experience, Jesus explained the strong connection between welcoming children and welcoming himself into one's presence, exactly what is done in the corporate public worship of God's people.)

9) Matthew 19:13-15 (cf. Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17 [v.15: even babies were included] What does this event have to do with church worship? Though the occasion may not have involved worship, especially corporate worship, it is a clear indication that Jesus wants children in his presence, precisely what occurs the worship of God's covenant people.)

10) Matthew 25:31-40 (esp. v. 40)

11) Luke 2:41-52 (esp. v. 42)

12) John 6:1-13 (v. 9 Jesus used the bread and fish a boy brought to feed the people. How does this passage relate to intergenerational corporate worship? Again, though likely not a worship service, it establishes the fact that a child's presence and contribution are deemed valuable to the Lord.)

13) Acts 20:7-12 (The Greek words for "young man" in vs. 9 and 12 indicate Eutychus was likely from 8-12 years old.) See also Acts 21:5, children.

b. After five minutes of individual reading and reflection, ask the groups to have each member share with the others in the small group what he or she found in his or her passages.

c. After 20 minutes reconvene the small groups into the large group, and ask the reporters to share their group's findings (one at a time per group) for each text. Add any of the information in the parentheses beside the texts in a. above that has not been mentioned in the group reports.

- **Be sure to point out that the Bible passages clearly show that all the people in God's covenant community, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, participated in Israel's and the church's corporate worship events.**

Intergenerational Worship Today

2. Summarize what we have just seen in the Scriptures: that God has always intended for children and all other age groups to be a part of the corporate worship of his covenant people.

   a. Next, ask the participants to answer this question, first individually for 10 minutes and then in their groups: "What are you doing now in your worship services in your home church that will engage all ages, including even young children, teenagers, young adults, middle age adults and older adults?"

   b. After 10 minutes ask the groups to reconvene as one large group and their recorders to state, one at a time per group until all have reported, what they are doing in their churches to include children and teenagers as well as adults in their worship services. Project the responses recorders give so all can see and record them.

Planning Worship that Will Engage All Generations

3. Now ask the attendees to focus on this question, first individually for 10 minutes and then in their small groups: "In the light of what we've studied in the Bible in this session and from what we've just heard that others are doing, what modifications can we make in our public church worship services to include all ages so everyone can feel meaningfully involved and sense that he or she is in God's presence and in dialogue with him?" (NOTE: Consider suggesting that they organize themselves into three new groups for this task on the basis of their interest: [1] a group for those who prefer to focus on children, [2] another group for those who want to think about teenagers, and [3] a third group for those who wish to concentrate on adults.)

   a. After 30 minutes, ask all to reconvene and for the reporters to share their group's work, one group and one subject area (e.g., involving children) at a time. List the responses on the device you used in 2.c. above.

   b. When all the groups have reported, add any of the following that were not mentioned by them, many of which have been done in other churches to include all ages. Don't wait until the end and add all these at once; mention them after all the groups have reported on a particular age range (e.g., children, teenagers). Don't overwhelm the group with too many ideas. Select from the following list several that seem most helpful.

Engaging Children in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors

- Older children can be asked to offer a prayer in the service.

- Older children, who read well, can be taught to read with expression and to read the Bible lesson before the sermon. Variations of this involvement of children include one or more children reading the text in different languages in addition to English and a child reciting the Bible text from memory with special emphasis, voice inflections, and gestures that help communicate the text accurately.

- Children, who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to do so in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble that practices and contributes regularly. Even young children can learn to play a hand drum, such as a djembe.

- A children's choir could be formed and sing several times a year in worship services. The choir can also sing with the adult choir antiphonally.

- Older children can usher and hand out children's bulletins.

- Where the church approves, older children can pass the offering plates. Some churches require only ordained deacons to serve in this capacity, so be sure to consult the pastor first before asking children to participate in this manner.

- Working alongside adults, children can help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them develop a sense of investment in and caring for the worship center where they meet God in a special way in a hallowed setting dedicated to his worship.

- Children can serve as acolytes.

- Children, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially significant to ask their parents to make this a family project with each member of the family participating.

- A group of older children could prepare dramatic readings of Bible passages on which the sermon is based. Two ways this can be done are acting out a passage in pantomime while it is being read aloud by someone else and by memorizing spoken parts in the text and acting it out in that manner, for example Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

- Children, together with teenage siblings and their parents, can serve as greeters prior to and after the worship service.

- Children can be invited to express their faith in Jesus Christ, either in an individual expression or by being interviewed by the worship leader. (This gives the congregation an opportunity to learn what Jesus meant when he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" [Matthew 18:3-4].)

- A boy and a girl can each carry a basket of food to the front of the sanctuary during a point in a Thanksgiving service. The two baskets represent gifts of food the congregation has collected for a local food pantry for those who are needy.

- Older children can carry flags of other countries into the sanctuary at the beginning of a worship service that has missions as its theme.

- Children, together with the rest of their family, can participate in lighting a candle in a large Advent wreath in the beginning of a worship service during the season of Advent. One child can light the candle for the day, another can explain the symbolism of that candle, another family member can read a passage from the Bible, and another can lead in prayer. A different family can do so for each of the other Sundays and at Christmas or Christmas Eve. The same can be done with a Lenten triad during the season of Lent; the triad is a triangular base, covered with purple cloth, which contains one candle for each week of Lent.

- A representative sample of children can serve on a Children's Advisory Council or a children's Worship Focus Group to comment on worship services and make suggestions for engaging children more fully in corporate worship.

Participating with Everyone Else

- Encourage families with children, especially those with small children, to sit as close to the front as possible, so the children can more easily see all that is going on and feel a part of the service.

- Singing
  o Sing at least one song in each service that the children have learned at home or in their classes.
  o Especially include songs the children like to sing.
  o Parents pointing to the words on the printed page will help their children learn the songs and help them increase their reading ability! Suggest to parents they explain the meaning of any words the children don't understand.
  o Use songs where the lyrics are understandable and relate to the children's experiences.

- Several means can be used to engage children during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
    - o Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord's Prayer).
    - o Use litanies (written prayers where the leader and congregation speak responsively).
    - o Include bidding prayers (usually during the General Prayers, where the leader mentions subjects and allows a brief time after each subject for people to offer their prayers either in silence or spoken out loud [e.g., "Now we pray for those who are ill." Then after a short while, "We pray for those out of work." Then, "We pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones."]).
    - o Whoever offers prayers should include concerns of children in the prayer (e.g., worries about the well being of parents and siblings, problems with friends, their health, school subjects).
    - o When prayers are printed in the bulletin or another source, make them easy to read, e.g., easy words, short sentences, and, if possible, larger print type (which will also help older adults).[2]
    - o Ask the whole congregation to write their prayer needs on a card or mention them to the pastor prior to the congregational prayer (the General Prayers). At that time make a special point to invite the children to do so as well.

- Give children a Children's Bulletin, which has activities in it, especially activities that are related to the service for the day. For example, it can have a page for younger children who can't write to just draw a picture of something that they hear in the sermon, a page for older children to answer questions about subjects in the sermon and that explains an aspect of the worship service (such as why we have an offering and telling why their offering is also valuable), and another page for older children for note-taking.

- Include the following in the sermon:
    - o Use words children can understand. When a complex word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration.
    - o Use examples children can relate to and that include children as well as those who are older.
    - o Make sure at least one point in the sermon applies to children, and specify for the children what that point is, including what it means for their lives.[3]
    - o Provide an outline of the sermon in the bulletin.
    - o Use visual aids in the sermon.

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[2] The first five means adapted from Carolyn Brown, "Including Children in the Worshiping Congregation." Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Conference on Liturgy and Music, Denver, Colorado, July 8, 2004.

[3] The first three concepts adapted from Carolyn Brown, "Preaching God's Word to Us AND Our Children." Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Conference on Liturgy and Music, Denver, Colorado, July 9, 2004.

- o Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the children and others specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.

- Children should be encouraged to give during the offering *from what they have earned*. The understanding of offering what they are giving to God and their involvement in doing so is enhanced if the congregation brings their gifts to the communion table or another designated place in the apse.

- Invite the whole congregation to say certain things at specific points during the service, for example:
  - o Saying "Amen" following the words, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord" at the end of prayers.
  - o Saying "Thanks be to God" after the Bible reading when the person who was reading concludes the Bible reading by saying, "This is the Word of the Lord."
  - o Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and a commitment to obey directly engages children in an edifying experience and important witness to any visitors who may not be Christians.

    Allow children who want to make a personal confession of faith to do so as well. Those who have had an especially significant experience in their faith can be allowed to share it with the congregation in the response to God's Word, or at the end of the service, followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.

- Use antiphonal readings for the Bible lesson, such as in Psalm 136, where the worship leader reads one part of the verse and the congregation reads the refrain, or where the choir reads one part and the rest of the congregation reads the refrain. Even small children can learn to say the refrain, thus feeling themselves being a part of the service.

- Reading Bible passages responsively (where the leader and the congregation take turns reading the verses aloud) involves children and all other ages together.

- Participating in the sacraments engages children and employs all five senses to help them worship and learn.
  - o Being baptized themselves, if they weren't as infants, facilitates a life changing relationship with God and marks them as members of his covenant people, the body of Christ.
  - o Gather the children around the baptismal font, or other location, whenever a baptism is celebrated
  - o Partaking of the Lord's Supper when old enough to understand its meaning connects children with Christ and fellow believers in a profound and life shaping experience. Some churches do not permit children who haven't made confession of faith to receive the elements, but they do

invite the children to come to the front of the sanctuary for a special blessing when the congregation comes to the communion rail and kneels. The pastor then lays his or her hands on and blesses the children.

- Greet children as well as older people after the service. Warmly express delight that they were present in the worship of the Lord.

Engaging Teenagers in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors

- Those teens with skills in music and leadership can lead in the singing of hymns, psalms, and songs. They can teach a new song to the congregation, in particular one that they especially enjoy, that is applicable to all ages, and that most others will find meaningful.

- Teenagers can be asked to offer a prayer in the service.

- Those who read well can be taught to read with expression the Bible lesson before the sermon.

- Where the church approves, teens can pass the offering plates. Where allowed the teens can help with the counting of the offering.

- Young people, who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to play in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble of teenagers or as part of an adult group that practices and contributes in worship services regularly.

- A teen choral group could be formed and sing several times a year in worship services. Teenagers should be invited also to sing in the adult choir.

- A group of teens could prepare dramatic readings of Bible passages on which the sermon is based, as described above, for example using Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and other narrative texts.

- Teens who write poetry can be asked to read a poem that they have written, or that someone else has written, that applies to the sermon subject.

- Youths, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially good to ask their parents to make this a family project with each member of the family participating. Teens may construct artistic expressions in other media as well, e.g., a sculpture of a Biblical event.

- Ask teenagers to usher.

- Teens can help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them develop a sense of investment in and caring for the worship center.

- If a sound system is used, teenagers can be asked to operate it.

- A teenager who knows sign language could be asked to sign for any who are hard of hearing in the congregation.

- Teenagers, together with their younger siblings and their parents, can serve as greeters prior to and after the worship service.

- Teens can be given an opportunity to publicly express their faith.
  o Teens who want to make a confession of faith can do so.
  o Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and a commitment to obey, directly engages teens in an edifying experience and an important witness to any visitors, especially other teenagers, who may not be Christians.
  o Those who've had an especially significant experience in their faith can be invited to share it with the congregation as part of their response to God's Word, or they can do so after the service, followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.
  o Teens who are maturing in Christ can be asked to present a sermon, where the church approves and with pastoral guidance.

- A commissioning can be held in the worship service, as part of the congregation's responding to God's Word, for a teen or a group of teens leaving on a short-term mission trip. Ask the commissioned person or group to report to the congregation upon returning.

- Ask at least two teenagers to serve on the Worship Planning Team in your church.

- A representative sample of teenagers can serve on a Teen Advisory Council or a teenagers' Worship Focus Group to comment on worship services and make suggestions for engaging young people more fully in corporate worship. Teens (more than one) could also be asked to serve on the church's worship planning team.

- Teenagers can carry flags of other countries into the sanctuary at the beginning of a worship service that has missions as its theme.

- Teenagers, together with the rest of their family, can participate in lighting a candle in a large Advent wreath in the beginning of a worship service during the season of Advent. A child or teenager can light the candle for the day, another can explain the symbolism of that candle, another family member can read a passage from the Bible, and another can lead in prayer. A different family can do so for each of the other Sundays and at Christmas or Christmas

Eve. The same can be done with a Lenten triad during the season of Lent; the triad is a triangular base, covered with purple cloth, which contains one candle for each week of Lent.

Participating with Everyone Else

- Singing
  - o Sing at least one song in each service that the teenagers have learned at home, in their youth groups, or in their classes.
  - o As much as possible include songs the young people like to sing.
  - o Use songs where the lyrics are understandable and relate to everyone and to teens in particular.

- Several means can be used to involve teenagers during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
  - o Whoever offers prayers should include concerns of teens in the prayer (e.g., worries about well being of parents and siblings, problems with friends, their health, what they will do for a living, school subjects).
  - o Ask the teens to write their prayer needs on a card or mention them to the pastor prior to the congregational prayer.
  - o Include bidding prayers (see above).
  - o Use litanies (see above).
  - o Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord's Prayer).

- Include the following in the sermon:
  - o Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the teens and others specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.
  - o Insert an outline of the sermon in the bulletin. Insert an outline of the sermon in the bulletin or on a projection screen. A sentence outline helps the congregation most accurately understand the main points of the sermon, not only during the worship service, but long after for those who save the insert together with any notes they have added
  - o Use words teenagers can understand. When a sophisticated word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration.
  - o Use examples teens can relate to and include teenagers in illustrations as well as those younger and older.
  - o Apply at least one point in the sermon to teenagers; specify for them what that point is and what it means for their lives.
  - o Use visual aids that are of excellent quality.

- Teens should be encouraged to give during the offering from what they have earned. The understanding of offering what they are giving to God and their involvement in doing so is enhanced if the congregation brings their gifts to the communion table or another designated place in the apse.

- Use antiphonal readings for the Bible lesson, such as in Psalm 136 (see above).

- Reading Bible passages responsively (where the leader and the congregation take turns reading the verses) involves teens and all other ages together.

- Participating in the sacraments engages teens and employs all five senses.
  o Being baptized themselves, if they weren't as infants, facilitates a life changing relationship with God and marks them as members of his covenant people, the body of Christ.
  o Partaking of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Eucharist, connects teens with Christ and fellow believers in a profound and life shaping experience.

- Greet teenagers as well as older people after the service. Warmly express delight that they were present in the worship of the Lord.

Engaging Adults in Corporate Worship

As Leaders and Special Contributors
- Adults can be asked to lead in offering a prayer in the service.

- Adults, who read well, can be taught to read with expression and to read the Bible lesson before the sermon.

- Where denominational policy permits, adults can be involved in distributing the elements of Holy Communion.

- Adults with musical and leadership skills can lead in the singing of psalms, hymns, and songs.

- Adults who play a musical instrument well, can be asked to play in the worship service, either individually or as part of an ensemble that practices and contributes regularly.

- Those who enjoy singing can join the choir or praise team and/or form a singing group.

- Adults can offer dramatic readings, as described above.

- Adults can usher.

- They can be invited to help clean and set up the sanctuary. Doing so helps them feel an investment in and caring for the worship center and develop a sense of the holiness of God in this place dedicated to his worship.

- Those with an interest and ability in technical matters can operate a sound system.

- Adults, who are interested in artwork, can be asked to make a banner for the sanctuary. It would be especially good to make this a family project with each member of the family participating. They may contribute art work in other media as well, e.g., a sculpture of a Biblical event.

- A commissioning could be held during the worship service for one or more adults leaving on a short-term mission trip.

- Adults can serve on a Worship Team that, together with the Pastor and the Minister of Music, plans the corporate worship services for the church.

- An adult can give a word of encouragement before the sermon, preparing hearers for the importance of listening well, or even more significantly after the sermon as part of the congregation's response to God's Word as encouragement to obey that teaching from the Bible. This encouragement will be especially effective if the adult doing so is a respected member of the congregation.

Participating with Everyone Else

- Sing at least one of the best of the historic hymns in each service. Doing so helps adults experience the blessings of a good tradition and enables the worshipers of all ages to learn Biblical theology in an enjoyable manner.

- Several means can be used to engage adults as well as all others during periods of prayer that will help them feel they are praying:
  o Regularly recite memorized prayers (e.g., the Lord's Prayer).
  o Use litanies (see above).
  o Include bidding prayers (see above).
  o Ask the adults to write their prayer needs on a card or mention them to the pastor prior to the congregational prayer.
  o When prayers are printed in the bulletin or another source, make them be easy to read, e.g., easy words, short sentences, and, if possible, larger print type (which will also help children and older adults).

- Include the following in the sermon:
  o Provide some questions in the church bulletin under the title of the sermon that give the congregation specific subjects to listen for that will be included in the sermon.
  o Insert an outline of the sermon in the bulletin. A sentence outline helps the congregation most accurately understand the main points of the sermon, not only during the worship service, but long after for those who save the insert together with any notes they have added.
  o For the most part offer sermons that are focused on and explain a passage of the Bible. Expository sermons, that help people connect with, understand, and apply God's Word in their lives, provide what they most long for and need to know.

- o Use words children can understand without definition; in that way all adults will comprehend easily what you are saying. When a sophisticated word or term has to be used, define and explain it, and give an illustration.
- o Use examples people can relate to for each point in the sermon. Tell at least a couple of relevant stories, but regarding the stories be careful of the following:

  - Don't tell too many stories.
  - Keep the stories as short, succinct, and to-the-point as possible.
  - Make sure the people can clearly understand how the main point of each story relates to the point to which it applies in the sermon.

- o Apply at least one point in the sermon to the needs of most adults in the congregation; specify for them what that point is and what it means for their lives.

- Adults should be encouraged to give during the offering. Adults, together with the rest of the congregation, can bring their offering to baskets or plates on the communion table or elsewhere in the apse.

- Give the whole congregation, adults included, the opportunity to participate by using antiphonal and responsive readings for the Bible lesson.

- Participating in the sacraments involves adults and employs all five senses.

- Adults can serve as greeters prior to and following the worship service; those who are parents, can do so together with their children of all ages. Greeting in this manner sends a subtle but strong message that everyone else in these age ranges is warmly welcome in the worship service.

- Reciting a confession of faith, such as the Apostles' Creed, and a commitment to obey the Lord's commands, directly engages adults in an edifying experience and an important witness to any visitors who may not be Christians.
  - o Adults who want to make a confession of faith do so when joining the church, and they can do so as well on other occasions as a testimony to God's current work in their lives, enabling others to sense how God is active in his people's minds, hearts, and daily experiences.
  - o Those who have had an especially significant experience in their faith can be allowed to share it with the congregation as part of their responding to God's Word or after the service followed by a congregational expression of thanksgiving to God.

c. After you've constructed the long list produced by this group activity, be sure to emphasize that they don't have to do all these things at once, or even every one of them. Tell them to not be overwhelmed; do just one, two, or as many as they can at a time and the rest as they have resources for doing in the future. Mention that

they should involve others also to help implement the ideas they select, so they don't have to do all the work themselves.

d. **Be sure to point out that the worship service does not have to be, nor should it be, made into a fun activity or made simplistic in an attempt to accommodate it to children and youth. The younger ones can understand much, and they will grow in their understanding as they worship regularly over the years with their parents and other adults in God's covenant community.**

e. Next ask the group, "While we were constructing this list of what can be done in our worship services to engage all ages in God's worship, is there anything else anyone has thought of that we could add to the list?"

4. For the remaining time in this session, continue to construct your Action Plans. First individually, then in your groups of four, reflect on these questions. Write them on the flipchart, chalkboard, overhead, or other projection device you use. Add any other questions that may be helpful.

a. What changes should I implement in my church back home
   1) To engage children in corporate worship?
   2) To engage teenagers in corporate worship?
   3) To engage adults in corporate worship?

b. Which changes should I implement first?

5. Closing prayer

About the Author

Edward D. Seely is Adjunct Professor of Education at Calvin College and Adjunct Professor in Educational Ministries at Calvin Theological Seminary, where he taught and was the founder and Manager of the Ministry Resource Center with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship prior to his recent retirement. Prior to coming to Calvin in 2002, he served churches in the Midwest for 37 years, specializing in the educational aspect of the ministry. He has traveled widely, including trips to Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Mexico. His published books include *Teaching Early Adolescents Creatively* (Westminster Press). He has written chapters in several other books, and many articles in both the popular and scholarly literature, including a two-year column, "Tips for Teachers" in *The Church Herald* and an ongoing column in other church publications. Dr. Seely has been active in civic and interdenominational church work. He and his wife Carol are the parents of two adult children: Janet (Mrs. Robert) Sandberg and Jonathan Seely. They have two grandchildren, Abigail Faith Sandberg and Sarah Hope Sandberg.