

Paradigm Shift in the Church
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Introduction:

What This Book Is About

- The greatest obstacle to strategic church development is not a lack of methodical know-how, but deep-rooted theological blockages.

Why People Talk at Cross Purposes

- Some advocates of church growth – whether consciously or unconsciously – think in a different theological paradigm than their critics.

Is Numerical Growth the Key?

- Are the movements that put “church growth” or “church development” on their agenda restricted to a particular school of theological thinking?

Part One:

Church Growth Between Spiritualism and Institutionalism

Chapter One:

The Starting Point of Natural Church Development: Bipolar Ecclesiology

The Dynamic and the Static

- The nature of the church is made up of two elements: a dynamic pole (organism) and a static pole (organization). Both are necessary for church development.

Dynamic Pole:

Organic
Grow
Freedom
“all by itself”

Static Pole:

Technical
Build
Order
Human-made

The Relationship Between Organization and Organism

- We can have control over the organization, but never the organism.
- We have discovered eight quality characteristics that are measurably more developed in growing churches. For each of these eight quality characteristics, the organizational level and the organic level are functionally related to each other.
 - Empowering leadership
 - Gift-orientated ministry
 - Passionate spirituality
 - Functional structures
 - Inspiring worship service
 - Holistic small groups
 - Need-orientated evangelism
 - Loving relationships

Dangers to the Right and to the Left

- The relationship between the static and the dynamic poles is sadly out of balance.
- It can go astray in one of two directions: to the left, which is anti-institutional and is labeled as “spiritualistic paradigm; or to the right, towards a monistic objectivism, which is labeled as “institutionalistic paradigm.”

Chapter Two:

Danger to the Right: The Institutionalistic Misconception

- The following are five characteristics are typical of the pure form of the institutionalistic misconception:
- Characteristic 1: Objectivism:
Objectivism arises out of an understandable human drive for security.
Whatever version of the institutionalistic misconception is involved – fundamentalism, sacramentalism, dogmatism, traditionalism, clericalism, and so forth – the basic urge for security can always be clearly seen.
The mistake lies in the wish “that revelation should be secured – in such a way that in reality the church secures itself.

- Characteristic 2: Heteronomism
There is a longing for a legalistic, manageable authority. Heteronomism can be the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. What need is there for a personal relationship with Christ if the acceptance of doctrinal statements, the adherence to a moral code, or the subjection to ecclesiastical authority is sufficient.
- Characteristic 3: Formalism
Life is replaced by a multitude of rituals.
- Characteristic 4: Rationalism
Theological rationalism is a rejection of all forms of religious “experience.”
- Characteristic 5: Magic
Merely performing the sacrament automatically guarantees its effectiveness due to its integral qualities.

Chapter Three:

Danger to the Left: The Spiritualistic Misconception

- Spiritualism can be understood on the one hand as a countermovement to the paralysis and formalism of orthodoxy, fundamentalism, dogmatism, and other forms of the institutionalistic misconception (in the same way as the institutionalistic position is partly a conscious countermovement to spiritualistic tendencies).
- Characteristic 1: Subjectivism
Proponents of the institutionalistic paradigm are right when they insist that faith must appeal to an objective element. Their mistake is that, for them, this objective element is not Jesus Christ, but the institution. Thus, they are in danger of substituting the *organization* for Christ.
In the same way, proponents of the spiritualistic paradigm are right when they turn away from this objectivism and emphasize that faith must be appropriated subjectively. Their mistake is that, under the surface, they make religious experience the standard by which everything else is judged.
This inspiration occurs moment by moment, without any rules or standards.

- Characteristic 2: Autonomism
The central aspect is always the desire to establish the autonomy of the individual.
The direct contact between the spiritualist and God.
- Characteristic 3: Dualism
The spirit is given absolute priority, while the material world is, at best, regarded as unimportant and, at worst, as evil.
Terms like “planning,” “strategy,” or “principals” are anathema.
“Mere humans can’t contribute anything to church development.”
- Characteristic 4: Irrationality
Spiritualists tend to regard the irrational as being more spiritual than things that can be explained rationally.
- Characteristic 5: Mysticism
The Greek word *myein* is a synonym for the rejection of the world of the senses, empirical reality, and logical thinking.
The mystic is against *institutions in themselves*.

Chapter 4:

The Fight Between Spiritualism and Institutionalism

Who Is a Christian?

- How is being a Christian understood within the institutionalistic paradigm?
- Specific characteristics or behaviors are defined which are deemed to be constitutive. Whether a person is a Christian depends on whether he or she fills these criteria. Anyone who does not fulfill them is outside the circle.
- Conversion is understood as being a real “turning around.”

The Ideological Nature of Spiritualism and Institutionalism

- When you have spiritualism, you have the need for freedom and spontaneity.

Chapter 5:

The Root of Misconceptions: The Impersonal God

Spiritualism and Institutionalism as Consequences

- On the basis of the impersonal view of God, two different paths can be trodden with equal logical justifications: the path to spiritualism and the path to institutionalism. Which of these paths a person chooses largely depends on whether he or she has a greater longing for “freedom” or for “order.”

Chapter 8: Three Reformations

The Third Reformation: Our Task Today

- I do not believe that we need to develop new theological formulas.
- Our problem is that the wonderful insights of Reformation and Pietism are largely smothered in the mire of unsuitable structures.
- I have already pointed out that the opponents of the church growth movement are mainly to be found among those that we would call “orthodox.” This is where history repeats itself. Whereas the first reformation set out to fight against Roman Catholic orthodoxy, before long it became orthodoxy itself. Then Pietism stood up against Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy – and soon itself became orthodoxy. Reform movements in our days must, therefore, expect resistance to come from evangelical orthodoxy.

Structures and Life

- There are seven reasons to take the structural questions more seriously:
 - *First*, structures are never neutral. Structures can be useful for church development; they can also be a definite hindrance.
 - *Second*, our surveys of over 1,000 churches all over the world have shown that the quality characteristic “functional structures” is one of the eight essential signs of a growing church.
 - *Third*, the same surveys showed that the measurable difference between growing and declining churches is nowhere as great as in the area of “structures.”
 - *Fourth*, in the churches we have studied so far, it has become apparent that, of the eight quality characteristics,

- the point “functional structures” is one of the most frequent “minimum factors.”
- *Fifth*, it is in the nature of the spiritualistic and institutionalistic paradigms not to take the question of functional structures seriously.
 - *Sixth*, biological research has shown that what differentiates “dead material” from “living organisms” is not – as a lay person may assume – a difference in substance, but the specific structure by which the individual parts are connected to each other.
 - *Seventh*, the biblical analogy of the body of Christ points us in a similar direction. This illustration makes it clear that each Christian has a specific function in the body.
- It was the achievement of the first reformation that it *rediscovered* the dimension of personal faith and the priesthood of all believers. The achievement of the second reformation was to start *exercising* these central concepts. The task of the third reformation will be to structure the church in such a way that the concerns the first two reformations fought for can become normal in the daily life of the church.

Part Two:
The Theological Paradigm Behind Natural Church Development

Part A:
Christian Faith

Chapter Two:
Christian Faith and Fundamentalism: The Conflict About Scripture

Danger to the Right: Fundamentalism

- It is part of the logic of this mechanistic misconception that bitter battles are fought over the inspiration of every Greek *iota* and every Hebrew vowel mark.
- If the theory of verbal inspiration were true, its advocates would have to admit that the manuscripts on which we base our modern translations are not identical with the original manuscript that was supposedly dictated letter by letter, so that we have no access to the single, authoritative Scriptures.

Practical Illustration: The Quality Characteristic “Passionate Spirituality”

- We found that the devotional style of a church is not decisive for its growth. But it is decisive that the Christians live their faith with passion.
- An atmosphere of expectation characterizes growing churches. Concepts such as an intensive prayer life, love for the word of God, and encouragement of spiritual maturity are hallmarks of these churches.

Chapter Three: Between Legalism and “Cheap Grace”: The Conflict About Law and Liberty

Dangers to the Right: Legalism

- It is not obedience to the biblical commands that we rightly call legalism, but the attempt to make the law into the way of salvation.

The Bipolar Approach

- *First*, the church of Jesus Christ should always strive for commitment in ethical questions.
- *Second*, the adherence to rules and orders that a church sets up for itself should never be understood as an end in itself, only as a means to an end.
- *Third*, following a specific ethical code must never be made a prerequisite of faith.
- *Fourth*, no ethical code must be allowed to lead us to regard God’s will as static, as if God required the same of all Christians in all stages of their lives.

Practical Illustration: The Quality Characteristic “Loving Relationships”

- In the questions we have developed for this purpose we do not ask about people’s intentions, but rather about the practical effects of love. How often do the Christians invite each other for meals or for coffee? Is there someone in the church they can pour their hearts out to if they have personal problems? How

generously are compliments given in church? Do the Christians feel at home in their small groups?

- Churches that showed signs of being influenced by either the legalistic or the libertinistic misconception generally had difficulty in practicing love.
- Churches that have a low “love quotient” often have problems with evangelism, too.
- Our aim is to help groups to develop a strong commitment in ethical questions, but at the same time to avoid any form of legalism.

Part B:

Christian Fellowship

Chapter One:

“The Ritual Makes the Christian”: The Conflict About Baptism and Communion

Danger to the Left: Spiritualism

- The mistake of sacramentalists is to make the sacraments almost into Gods.
- Spiritualists tend to believe that Christ was not really incarnate and not really historical, they tend to reject the bodily, sensory character of the sacraments and thus, implicitly, the empirical, historical dimension of the church.

The Bipolar Approach

- *First*, the deliberations up to this point lead to the conclusion that different opinions on the sacraments are not necessarily divisive for the unity of the church.
- *Second*, it is also clear where a functional understanding of the sacraments draws the line.
- *Third*, baptism and communion should always be administered in a way that emphasizes the dimension of fellowship.
- *Fourth*, both baptism and communion should be real celebrations.

Practical Illustration: The Quality Characteristic “Inspiring Worship Service”

- The approach behind this quality characteristic is opposed to any magical understanding of worship services, any concept that implies that the fulfilling of a ritual of some kind can conjure up the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- “Inspiring worship services” are characterized by the presence of many enthusiastic Christians who worship God together. They speak of the everyday questions and needs of the congregation, and they project a positive atmosphere both verbally and non-verbally.

Chapter Two:
Between Supra-Historical and Anti-Historical Tendencies:
The Conflict About Tradition and Change

Danger to the Right: Traditionalism

- Traditionalism is the attempt to “steamroller” the present and the future with the structures of the past.

The Bipolar Approach

- *First*, a functional understanding of tradition assumes that we can learn an enormous amount from the experience of our spiritual mothers and fathers.
- *Second*, this willingness to learn from history includes a willingness to learn from our ancestors how *not* to do things.
- *Third*, it is important for every church that it develops specific habits, and thus “new traditions.”
- *Fourth*, a functional understanding of traditions cannot ignore the fact that there are traditions that must be broken.
- *Fifth*, this understanding of the relationship between tradition and change includes the aim of encouraging the church to dare to experiment more.

Practical Illustration: The Quality Characteristic “Functional Structures”

- This quality characteristic signifies that it is not important how many or how few structures a church has, or whether its structures are old or new, but the criterion is how useful they are in a specific situation.
- First of all, all structural efforts are directed towards clearly formulated church guidelines (philosophy of ministry”). Second,

all “successful” structures concentrate on the specific focus as defined in the philosophy of ministry, which includes the willingness to eliminate all that is not useful. Third, the structures of growing churches are almost entirely multiplication structures; that is, they are not geared to additive growth.

Chapter Three:
Spiritual Unity or Monopolism?
The Conflict About Church Planting and Cooperation

The Bipolar Approach

- The bipolar approach to the question of church planting and cooperation is based on the assumption that a variety of churches is basically positive.

Practical Illustration: The Quality Characteristic “Holistic Small Groups”

- The central principle behind the concept of church planting, multiplication, can be illustrated by reference to one of the quality characteristics we identified. We call it “holistic small groups.”
- “Holistic” means that they provide a situation in which individual Christians can find personal relationships and the opportunity to share spiritually. These small groups are places where “fellowship” has a strong affinity to “friendship.”
- These groups can fulfill a variety of different tasks. They are a suitable setting for learning to use spiritual gifts, a place where Christians can offer counseling to each other, the members can find ministries which suit their gifts, and some groups have a definite evangelistic aim.
- Such groups can be a recruiting ground for the future leadership of the church.
- The specifically “biotic” nature of this quality characteristic includes the principle that small groups must be allowed to die.

Part C:
Christian Service

Chapter One:

“The Priesthood of All Believers”: The Conflict About Gifts and Office

- Spiritual gifts are not meant to glorify the person who has them – they are meant to serve for the building up of the church.

Danger to the Right: Clericalism

- Clericalism can be found in the Protestant churches, especially in the form of the following five concepts:
 - *Concept 1: The pastor as an all-rounder.* The gifts are “entombed within the pastor’s office.”
 - *Concept 2: Lay members as the pastor’s “helpers.”*
 - *Concept 3: The leader as a spiritual “guru.”* “Obedience to the authority is equated with morality.”
 - *Concept 4: Active involvement as a spiritual form of “Taylorism.”* A list of tasks is fixed in advance, then “volunteers” are sought to do them. In this technocratic concept, those who actively get involved are no more than parts in a statically defined cog system.
 - *Concept 5: Service in the church as a sacrifice.* This concept is the culmination of the misconceptions outlined so far. In this approach it is almost impossible that anyone might actually enjoy their ministry in the church.

Danger to the Left: Individualism

- The inherent tendency in spiritualism to refuse a sober, practical link between gifts and tasks sometimes tries to justify itself by a further argument that is typical of this thought pattern: spiritual gifts are identified exclusively with the extraordinary, spectacular, and supernatural, so that practical “planning” for church development is impossible from the outset.

The Bipolar Approach

- *First*, it should be one of the most urgent tasks of church leadership to help all Christians to discover their spiritual gifts.
- *Second*, each of the gifts discovered should be matched with specific tasks.

- *Third*, this approach means that “leadership” should be seen as one gift among many.
- *Fourth*, anyone who discovers that the task they are currently doing does not correspond with their spiritual gifts should leave this ministry as soon as possible.

Practical Illusion 2: The Quality Characteristic “Empowering Leadership”

- Leaders of growing churches invert the pyramid of authority so that the leaders assist Christians to release the spiritual potential that is already in them. These leaders equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be.
- “Less like that of a shepherd of sheep, and more like that of the trainer of a team.”

Part Three: The Biotic Approach to Church Growth

Chapter One: The New Paradigm

Technical and Organic Thinking in Church Development

- We can *build up* the quality of the church, but the quantity can only *grow*. It is not in our power to “make” the attendance at church services increase, but it is possible to take practical action to improve the quality of the church.

Chapter Four: Thriving in the Third Millennium

Spiritual and Secular Mega-Trends

- *Mega-trend 1: The trend towards multiple opinion Christianity.*
 - The question they will ask will be: Where are my needs best met?

- *Mega-trend 2: Revival of Christian spiritualism.*
 - Pagan spiritualism is on the upsurge.
- *Mega-trend 3: Restoration of the institutionalistic paradigm.*
 - Most trends (both secular and spiritual) point in the opposite direction, some adherents of this paradigm will make an even greater effort to establish their case.
- *Mega-trend 4: Flight into pragmatism.*
 - Some Christians will take refuge in a pragmatism that is hostile towards all sorts of theology.
- *Mega-trend 5: Discovery of a national perspective.*
 - Christians of different backgrounds come together to develop a national vision.
- *Mega-trend 6: From addition to multiplication.*
 - Innumerable new churches will be planted. Currently about 1,600 new churches are planted worldwide each week, and we can expect this trend to accelerate.

The Chances for Church Growth

- We do not want to go *back* to things of the past – we want to go *forward* to new experiences that we ourselves do not yet know!
- The more we go out of our way to find new, creative ways to win as many non-Christians as possible, the more we will have the painful experience that the real resistance comes from other Christians.
- If we really want to act on our insights, we must devote our energy to finding out what methods will be helpful.