

Biblical Church Growth
Research Issues for Growing Faithful Churches in the Third
Millennium

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BIBLICAL CHURCH GROWTH

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Gary L. McIntosh

Introduction

I am honored to be invited to address this gathering of the Third International Lausanne Researchers Conference. I come to you as one who has spent his entire ministry in North America, and my viewpoint will no doubt reflect that fact. I realize my perspective is fraught with serious limitations. Thus, I ask you to consider my thoughts in the spirit with which they are presented, i.e., in grace and humbleness.

My present ministry is Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership in California, USA. In addition, I maintain an active seminar, consulting, and speaking schedule to church leaders across numerous denominations. My expertise is American Church Growth, and it is in that arena that my research, writing, and teaching are focused. Prior to becoming a professor, I spent three years as Vice President of Consulting for Dr. Win Arn's Institute for American Church Growth, and before that I ministered as a pastor in three different churches.

This year marks my twenty-sixth year as a participant, observer, and researcher in the Church Growth Movement. As you may recall, the Church Growth Movement first gained international attention with the publication of *Bridges of God* by Donald McGavran in 1955. However, the Church Growth Movement literally exploded on the scene at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. Although I was not privileged to be at that congress, those who were have told me it was an unforgettable experience. Donald McGavran and Ralph D. Winter presented keynote addresses related to church growth themes, but it was the workshops of C. Peter Wagner that demonstrated the growing force of church growth at that time. As it has been relayed to me by those who were in attendance, Dr. Wagner's workshops grew from 50 in attendance, to 300, to the point where approximately half of all participants were attempting to gain entrance into his sessions. Lausanne 1974 gave an international platform to the Church Growth Movement that has continued to grow during the past quarter century.

The Church Growth Movement's Contribution

The “magnificent obsession” of the Church Growth Movement is tied to three major themes: effective evangelism, mission strategy, and field research. The concern of the Church Growth Movement spans both a cross-cultural mission—how to start a movement to Christ within a given people group—and an intercultural mission—how to effectively evangelize people in cultures where the church is already present. Within these two mission arenas—cross cultural and intercultural—the Church Growth Movement has made three major contributions during the last half century.

The first major contribution was in helping church leaders see effective evangelism as not simply getting decisions but making disciples—defined as those who receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and serve Him in a local church. ✓

The second major contribution was in challenging church leaders to develop clear strategies and then align limited resources to target responsive people groups in order to reap the most evangelistic fruit. ?

The third major contribution was focusing on research as a means to discover the proper strategies to bring about effective evangelism. The use of interviews, questionnaires, field observations, and historical analysis were employed in designing effective mission strategies.

These three major contributions resulted in a number of sub-contributions that have significantly empowered mission strategies toward effective evangelism. In summary, these sub-contributions include, but are not limited to, a greater emphasis on the Great Commission, the identification of hidden peoples, a concern for church planting, a focus on reaching entire cities, a better understanding of church dynamics, and a stress on spiritual factors of church growth, especially spiritual warfare issues.

Research Issues

It is my contention that, as we enter the twenty-first century, church growth theory and theology, biblically understood, still provides the best answer to growing faithful churches. Of course, not everyone agrees with my contention. Older criticisms of the Church Growth Movement are still around, and new ones seem to appear each year. However, response to such criticisms must wait until another day as that is not the purpose of this paper.

Since we are discussing evangelistic research at the beginning of the twenty-first century at this conference, I believe it is important to take a fresh look at the core principles of the Church Growth Movement, and note a few research issues that spring forth from those principles. In my view there are ten core principles that can be stated as follows.

Principle #1: The Right Premise: God's Word

Church growth theory and theology has always had at its core a belief in the authority of the Bible. From the beginning it has been the view of the Church Growth Movement that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16), and whatever the Bible says, God says. For example, writing in 1974, Donald McGavran noted that, "The most important dimension of world evangelism is God's will: Christ's act on Calvary, His Resurrection, the sanctifying sending of the Holy Spirit and the authoritative infallible Bible" (Douglas 1975:95). Writing specifically about the Bible, Donald McGavran and Win Arn affirmed the importance of the authority of Scripture in church growth theory and theology when they said, "The first biblical principle Church Growth men emphasize is faithfulness to the plain meaning of the Bible, our authority" (McGavran and Arn 1977:26).

Today we are facing three dangers regarding biblical authority. The first danger is the loss of belief in the authority of Scripture. While this danger is not new, observation of the last twenty-five years has demonstrated that the weaker a church's position is regarding the authority of Scripture, the less likely it is to experience biblical church growth. Some churches and denominations that once held to a high view of biblical authority now relegate the Bible to such a low position of authority that they no longer have a spiritual mandate for church growth. Some churches no longer believe the biblical proposition that people are "lost" and alienated from God. Not surprisingly, a majority of such churches are mired in church decline, due in part to the lack of a spiritual mandate for growth. For if we do not believe the biblical proposition that people are lost, then there is no need to find them. If there is no need to find them, there is no spiritual authority for church growth.

The second danger is the extension of the authority of Scripture beyond the biblical canon to what some see as new revelation from God. Recent research into the

Why principles?
Why not 10 stones?
or 11?
or 10 points
discussions?

spiritual dynamics of church growth have allowed an acceptance of prophecy, words of knowledge, and similar manifestations as equal to, or nearly equal to, the Bible. While there is much to learn from churches with various theological perspectives, it is crucial to reaffirm that “. . . the Bible alone, relating all that can be known about the earthly life of Jesus Christ, is the inspired Word of God. It alone is a sufficient rule of faith and practice” (Douglas 1975:95). Biblical church growth holds that while engaged in our study and research on effective evangelism it is essential that we remember to “...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

The third danger is the post modern belief in the existence of multiple truths rather than only one truth. Post moderns do not deny that truth exists, but hold that each person has his own truth. In the post modern view there are as many forms of truth as there are people. This has led to a privatized religion where each person is a truth or religion unto himself. In contrast, Scripture declares that truth exists, and it is found in the written, living Word. The psalmist writes, “Thy righteousness is everlasting and your law is true” (Ps 119:142), and “All your words are true; and your righteous laws are eternal” (Ps 119:160). Jesus declares himself to be “. . . the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). Believers are to strive to be those who, “. . . correctly handle[s] the word of truth” (2 Tim 3:15). And notably, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17).

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be found among churches that hold to the authority of Scripture, i.e., they will not abandon biblical authority, add to biblical authority, nor accept multiple authorities. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- How do we reach a new generation of postmodern people who believe that each person’s individual opinion is equally authoritative with biblical proposition?
- How do we effectively communicate the gospel to those who do not accept the Bible as authoritative?
- How far can we go in adopting methods of church growth that come from churches that do not accept the Bible as authoritative?

Principle #2: The Right Priority: Make Disciples

Church growth researchers believe that God wants His church to grow, and that growth should primarily come through evangelizing the lost. The Father's priority of seeking and finding the lost is apparent in the life of Jesus Christ who came to "seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10). The birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and ultimate return of Jesus Christ are all tied to the desire of the Father to find the lost and bring them into reconciliation with himself. As theologian Arthur Glasser noted nearly thirty years ago, "The crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord are inherent to the record of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet, the events surrounding his cross and empty tomb do not climax the gospel narratives. The climax is his issuance of the mandate to disciple the nations. And this mandate is to be obeyed. Jesus Christ expects us to give ourselves to the task of gathering the lost" (Conn, et al. 1977:31). Gathering the lost puts evangelism as the first priority. We must proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Savior and persuade persons to become His disciples and responsible members of His church.

Last century, this principle led to a debate as to whether a priority should be given to evangelism or social action. Today's emerging generation of missionaries, church planters, and church leaders do not see a distinction between "evangelism" and "social action." They believe to be Christian and to bring the Good News to the lost, does not allow us to drive a wedge between these two areas. To the younger generation, evangelism is not lost in a plea for social concern, and social concern is not separated from the eternal destiny of the lost. In their minds Jesus Christ came to bring salvation to the lost, but He also healed, fed, and cared for the unfortunate along the way. Thus, as Christians, we must be concerned about bringing care, justice, and healing to people and our world. We must be involved in managing our environmental resources in redeemable ways. However, while evangelism and social action are no doubt wedded closely together, and this debate is not as prominent as in the past, church growth theology holds that making disciples implies a logical priority of finding the lost. For before people can develop a heart of love and justice, they must experience the regenerating work of salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

A new slant on the question of priority has arisen in the last few years. Prominent leaders are suggesting that the priority for the twenty-first century should not be on church growth but on building a healthy church and/or individual spiritual formation. As examples, note the recent adoption of *Natural Church Development* as a new paradigm for church renewal. In addition, take note of the recent comment by veteran missiologist James Engel, who wrote, “. . . we must acknowledge that the time has arrived when we are called by our Lord to move away from continued evangelistic mobilization and to build upon that existing Christian presence. In short, we must make disciples of these nations by making a renewed commitment to spiritual formation, not to numerical growth” (Engel 2000:58).

The new movement away from evangelism to a focus on church health and/or spiritual formation appears to be driven in part by a desire on the part of some church leaders to have less accountability for growth. A church growth researcher in Korea recently told me that the movement to focus on church health, rather than church growth, is growing in his country. When I asked why this was so when church growth principles have been quite fruitful in Korea, he related that pastors in Korea feel church growth causes them to minister under pressure, while the church health paradigm allows them to minister in peace.

What is interesting is that biblical church growth has always been concerned with the planting, multiplying, nurturing, and renewing of *healthy* churches. Church growth desires healthy churches, but it emphasizes numerical growth as an indication of such health. And, while we all want healthy churches, we must ask the question, “Can a church be healthy if it doesn’t grow?” Of course, in some situations it may be possible, especially in locations where the church is highly persecuted. However, observation has noted that even in countries where the church is not free to assemble publicly, an underground church often experiences numerical growth. In the great majority of church situations it is difficult to think a church could honestly be labeled “healthy” if it were not growing by making countable disciples. Not only did Jesus Christ categorically state that He would build His church, thereby sovereignly guaranteeing church growth, but He left us with a command to “make disciples,” thereby sovereignly giving us a part in church growth. By the way the disciples responded to Christ’s command, as described in the

book of Acts, it is obvious they expected healthy churches to win people to Christ and assimilate new believers, resulting in the expansion of existing churches and the extension of daughter churches. Church growth is the point! Let us be careful that we do not use the guise of church health, or any other supposedly new paradigm, as an excuse for non growth.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be found among churches that maintain the priority of Jesus Christ—making disciples by seeking and saving the lost. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- How effective will the focus on church health be in making disciples?
- Will focusing on church health lead more people into the kingdom?
- Will focusing on church health create an ingrown church no longer fulfilling its mission to make disciples?

Principle #3: The Right Process: Discipleship

Biblical church growth views discipleship as a process that begins with finding the lost, folding them into a local church, and then building them up in the faith. This process comes directly from Christ's command to "make disciples" (Matt 28:19). The Holy Spirit indicates a clear process in the three participles that tell us *how* to make disciples. The chart below pictures the relationship of these participles to the command.

Make Disciples

Matthew 28:19-20:	Going	Baptizing	Teaching
Theologically:	Salvation	Identification	Sanctification
Programmatically:	Evangelism	Assimilation	Education
Personally:	Believing	Bonding	Growing
Popularly:	Finding	Keeping	Building

As we can see from the chart, the three participles are the words going, baptizing, and teaching. Going refers to the action of winning unbelievers to Jesus Christ. Other words that can be used interchangeably are salvation, evangelism, and believing. Baptizing refers to the action of becoming part of the community of faith. There is a two-fold identification in that the new believer is to identify with Christ (Rom 6:3-11) and to identify with a local church (Ac 2:41). Other words that could be used for this action are

assimilation, incorporation, and bonding. Teaching refers to the action of spiritual formation. Other words that could be used for this action are sanctification, education, and growth.

Essential to a full understanding of the Great Commission is an awareness that *all* of these actions rightfully fall under the umbrella called discipleship. Inherent in discipleship is the idea of a process that moves from believing to bonding to growing. Theologically and strategically, the order of process moves along this pathway. Of course, in actual ministry situations the exact order of the process may be interchanged.

One of the challenges facing churches in the new millennium is a need to reorder this process somewhat to reach post moderns. Preliminary research into reaching the post modern generation is indicating that post moderns often desire to be accepted into the community of faith where they can observe the life and behavior of the believers more closely. They come to Christ after, or more rightly while, being in the community of faith. Post moderns want to see the walk of believers, as well as hear their talk. They desire to know if believers live what they believe. As a result, post moderns wish to experience some level of assimilation into a church community before they believe. It may be a major challenge for current churches to adapt to this new process where assimilation and spiritual formation comes before evangelism.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be found among churches that develop a process of discipleship that takes into consideration the three actions: evangelism, assimilation, and education. Thus, research issues related to this principle include . . .

- What processes of assimilation are effective in reaching post moderns?
- Is it possible to rearrange the discipleship process by allowing people to be assimilated into church communities before they are believers? If so, what degree of assimilation is acceptable?
- How do we assimilate new believers into a local church when many are turned off by the institutional church?

Principle #4: The Right Power: Prayer

There is no biblical church growth apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Donald McGavran affirmed this when he wrote, "The growth of the Church is always brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit. As in the New Testament Church, so today, the Holy Spirit leads, convicts of sin, converts, builds up, selects missionaries and thrusts them out to ripened fields. The concern of Christians today must be to understand the workings of the Holy Spirit and to be open to His leading" (McGavran 1959:55). Mission theologian George Peters affirmed McGavran's view when he wrote that "...church growth will always contain an element of mystery that defies all human penetration, analysis, and definition and that casts us back on the Head of the church in prayer, trustful waiting, and patient labors" (Peters 1981:49).

The enthusiastic acceptance of pragmatic methods during the last century left the impression among observers that church growth adherents cared more about strategy than the Holy Spirit. In an effort to correct this misunderstanding this past decade, church growth research has focused on what Elmer Towns calls the "Spiritual Factors" of church growth. Peter Wagner and others have studied and written about numerous of these factors, and more is likely to be produced on this issue in the years to come. The focus on spiritual factors is seen in a new interest in the study of revival, but most notably in new developments in spiritual warfare such as spiritual mapping, prayer walking, prayer summits, identification and mobilization of intercessors, concerts of prayer, on-site praying, and fasting. The impact of the emphasis on spiritual warfare is clearly seen in the popularity of the recent prayer movement known as the 10/40 Window. An international prayer movement was aimed at this area of the world where most of the unreached peoples of the world live.

We can all agree that our "... struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). However, most of the models being used for spiritual warfare today are borrowed from the charismatic, Pentecostal, or new apostolic churches. These churches have grown dramatically in the last quarter century, and most of the credit has been given to the forms of spiritual warfare used by them. Some of these new forms of spiritual warfare have gained wide acceptance, while

a few new forms continue to be questioned. For example, while some branches of the church accept spiritual mapping as a valid practice, others see it as simply “spiritual shamanism.” Thus, the understanding and practice of spiritual warfare is likely to be an area of research and debate in the first part of the twenty-first century.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be found among churches that trust in the imponderable work of the Holy Spirit. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- What are the best models for training people in the area of spiritual warfare?
- How do we deal with the realities that unbelieving peoples often experience in relation to the spirit world?
- Is the pentecostalization of the church the only effective form of spiritual warfare, or are there other forms, not quite as visible, that are equally as effective?

Principle #5: The Right Pastor: A Team Builder

Leadership has always been a major factor in the growth of God’s kingdom. Many of the books of the Bible carry the names of God’s leaders, such as Joshua, Ruth, Nehemiah, Matthew, James, and John. Other books of the Bible tell the story of God’s leaders, such as Acts that begins with Peter, moves to Philip, and on to Paul. Indeed pastoral leadership is so crucial that the first axiom or law of church growth is “The pastor must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price for growth” (Hoge and Roozen 1979:281). This axiom received popular exposure as one of Peter Wagner’s “Seven Vital Signs” (Wagner 1985:63) and continues to be a major principle of church growth theory and theology.

The most recent development of this principle is being promoted by leaders in the so-called New Apostolic Reformation. This new movement is creating new forms and procedures in local church government, inner church relations, leadership selection and training, and other important aspects of church life. One of the major tenants of this new movement is that the office of apostle did not cease to exist with the fathers of Christianity but continues to be operable today. The practical result of this view is that pastors are given great authority to lead churches and networks of churches. The major strength is that pastors are allowed to lead, while the major danger rests in the potential

for low accountability. Once again this model has been taken primarily from the Pentecostal branch of the church, but is not always accepted by other segments of the church. The final outcome of what is developing as a new debate in the Church Growth Movement is still to come.

What is certain is that the ability to build a team or network ranks as perhaps the primary skill needed by church growth pastors in the twenty-first century. Command-and-control leadership is beating a fast retreat. In its place are teaming, open communication, shared ownership, and flexibility. To be effective in the twenty-first century, pastors must decide to “make” ministers, rather than simply “be” a minister. They must see themselves as the “coach” of the team, rather than as the “owner” of the team.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be led by pastors who are able to build a network of teams who together lead the church forward to fulfill Christ’s purpose in the world. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- What new models of missiological partnerships are proving fruitful in reaching people for Christ?
- How can we use the new technologies of the Internet to build networks of teams?
- Are there others forms of church leadership being effectively used today that are representative of the broader church community, rather than simply the Pentecostal community?

Principle #6: The Right Philosophy: Cultural Relevance

The world of the twenty-first century represents one that continues to be a rich mosaic of cultures. While some cultures and languages are disappearing, thousands of different cultural expressions still exist in the world to which the gospel message must be adapted. As Donald McGavran reminded us some years ago, “The true goal is to multiply, in every piece of the magnificent mosaic, truly Christian churches which fit that piece, are closely adapted to its culture, and recognized by its non-Christians as ‘our kind of show’ ” (Douglas 1975:101). To reach post-modern, pre-Christian people, twenty-first century churches must continue to package the gospel in the style, language, esthetics, and music of their target audience.

Being culturally relevant is taking on new forms as the world becomes networked through the Internet. Communication and exchange of information has never been easier. English has emerged as a global *lingua franca*. The Internet is accessible from nearly every nation on the planet. If the apostle Paul were alive today, it is easy to imagine him revisiting the churches he established via airplane, writing his epistles via e-mail, and perhaps publishing them on his web site in various languages.

Globalization is challenging the growth of the church in two major ways. First, a common youth culture is developing worldwide. For example, the Irish super-group U2 sells its music on every continent to every people group. Strains of their songs may be heard in the homes of New York, London, Moscow, Tokyo, and Bangkok. The youth of the world speak a common cultural language. While this creates a loss of distinction between cultures, it also paves the way for the church to speak to people who have formerly been resistant or unreachable with the gospel. YWAM has become one of the world's largest mission agencies because it has deregulated missions by presenting the gospel to youth in a way that makes cultural and contextual sense in whatever nation YWAM is working in.

Second, trans-national businesses are developing that make national borders and national currency somewhat meaningless. In one sense national economies no longer exist, or at least are no longer independent. Multi-national corporations exert great power over numerous nations, peoples, and cultures. The divide between the rich and the poor continues to grow. The key distinction in the twenty-first century may not be what nation you are from or what your ethnic background is, but what your socioeconomic background is. Middle class people in India, Germany, and Mexico often have more in common with each other than they do with homeless people in their own countries. The disadvantaged have always been the most receptive to the gospel. Now, more than ever, the need for a holistic concern for the poor is necessary to maintain a credible Christianity.

Not in the UK!

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be experienced by churches that swim with the currents in matters of culture, but stand like a rock core values. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- How do we communicate to a people who are inoculated to their spiritual hunger by rampant materialism?
- How do we communicate and reach people living in the global “McWorld” culture exported by the Western countries where infotainment has created a common culture?
- How do we target the burgeoning global uni-culture, but also an increasing tribalized culture?

Principle #7: The Right Place: Receptive Areas

Growing churches in the twenty-first century will not ignore Christ’s mission to go into “all the world” (Mt 28:19), but they will believe effective use of their resources demands that they carefully select those who will be most responsive to their presentation of the gospel. As Donald McGavran reminded us thirty years ago, “The receptivity and responsiveness of individuals waxes and wanes. No person is equally ready at all times to follow ‘the Way.’” (McGavran 1970:216). Jesus directed us to place our emphasis on receptive people when He said, “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest” (Jn 4:35 NASB). The harvest will not always be ripe, but will quickly rot. Thus, the emphasis must always be placed on responsive peoples.

Of course, Scripture demonstrates that there is to be a continual process of sowing, watering, and reaping. Paul illustrates this principle well when he says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (1 Cor 3:6 NASB). This process requires that churches of the twenty-first century not abandon less responsive people, but, as McGavran suggested, “occupy fields of low receptivity lightly” (p. 230). There is to be a continual planting and watering among all people—receptive, moderately receptive, and non receptive. While holding non receptive people lightly, however, the majority of limited resources—people, time, money—must be directed to responsive people.

As we enter the twenty-first century, there appears to be receptivity to a general spirituality. The scientific world of the last century did not provide answers to hurting hearts, and communism did not offer anything solid for people’s souls. Each simply created a great hunger for spiritual connections, as noted by the openness to the gospel in

some countries that occurred after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Some countries of the world have become more closed to the gospel, especially with the rise of fundamentalist movements in various Islamic countries. Yet, the general tenor of the world is one of spiritual openness. Today's threat seems to be coming from the traditional cults and the rise of new religious systems out of the New Age Movement.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be experienced by churches that are able to see the people who are ripe for harvest and focus resources toward reaching them. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- What sectors of various societies are receptive, i.e., coming to Christ and being united with His Church?
- What is the best means to maintain a proper level of witnessing in non-receptive areas? Will the Internet provide an effective method to plant and water in non-receptive countries?
- To what degree will the increasing missionary work by cults and emerging new religions be a source of competition in our efforts to make disciples?
- What is the most effective way to respond to the resurgent fundamentalism among traditional faiths, linked with strong nationalistic tendencies, that put other faiths against Christian believers and their abilities to make disciples?

Principle #8: The Right Plan: Target Focused

Jesus told His disciples to "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt 9:38). Obviously, only some of the fields are ripe. Therefore workers must carefully target the fruit that is ready to be harvested. Churches that will experience growth in the twenty-first century will design their ministry on the principle that aiming at a clearly defined, receptive group of people produces more faithfulness than aiming at a broader, non-receptive one. Such churches will learn to think like the persons they want to reach. They will take the position that ministry is not about people inside the church as much as people outside of the church. They will ask questions like *What needs do they have that we can meet? What issues do they need to have answered? What is the best way to communicate to them?* In order for this to happen, churches must get to know their target population's culture, values, lifestyle, felt

needs, motivations, images, hang-ups, barriers, doubts about Christianity, language, and typical response patterns that are natural to them.

Research Issues

The diverse people groups in the world make it even more certain that biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be experienced by churches that pick a segment of people they want to reach and develop a ministry to reach that segment. Research issues related to this principle include . . .

- What specific peoples are open to the gospel in the twenty-first century?
- How can we identify receptive target populations more accurately?
- How can we marshal resources to reach receptive peoples more effectively?

Principle #9: The Right Procedure: Simple Structure

Today's churches are being challenged to develop new leaders, new methods, and new structures. The classic denominational structures through which many of us ministered for years are much less effective than in the past. Old denominations have been in decline for nearly half a century and show little potential to regain their status in the current spiritual climate. We no longer live in a world of Christendom, and today's unbelievers are not open to institutional churches.

We live in a new time of church leadership and management. Speed is king. The mantra of the twenty-first century is "Run fast, but don't miss a step." Churches in the twenty-first century cannot afford to focus on maintenance. Postmodern people expect results. Effective churches in the new millennium must develop a new form of church structure that makes room for quick movements, fast decisions, changing targets, new methods, and speedy communication.

Futurist Alvin Toffler has said, "Each age produces a form of organization appropriate to its own tempo" (Toffler 1970:143). Churches that rely on bureaucratic decision-making and planning will be left behind. Those that harness the power of rapid analysis and quick decision making will likely fair the best. The new structures that appear to be adapting the best build on trusting leadership, sharing of information across networks, and forming community around a common vision and philosophy.

Research Issues

In the rapidly changing post modern age of the twenty-first century, biblical church growth will be experienced by churches that develop simple organizational structures that allow them to take quick advantage of ministry opportunities. Research issues related to this principle include...

- What church structures appear to be the most effective at making disciples in the twenty-first century?
- What role are parachurch movements playing in the twenty-first century, i.e., are new converts springing forth from parachurch movements in greater number than before?
- Is the new generation of young people avoiding the traditional church for other structures? If so, what types of structures are they drawn to?
- Are the effective churches that assimilate new converts smaller, less-organized, and devoted to fellowship rather than dedicated to discipline of a recognized church that has more authority, recognized structure, and evidence of spiritual discipline?
- What new forms of Christianity are arising in Latin America, Asia, and Africa that are not recognized by institutionalized Christianity? How do they fit in the worldwide Christ-ward movement?
- Is the Cell Church structure effective in making disciples in all cultural situations or only those that have a relational orientation?

Principle #10: The Right People: Effective Ministers

Church growth is the sovereign act of God! Jesus' acknowledgment that He would build His church points to the reality that God himself is bringing growth to His church. The apostle Paul, however, reminds us that God works through human agency to accomplish this purpose when he says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (1 Co 3:6). He also reminds us that "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:11-12).

The concepts of the priesthood of believers, spiritual gifts, and lay ministry are not new ones. Yet, while there are notable exceptions, the great majority of churches still struggle with implementing a workable plan to involve laity in personal ministry. The problem is complex, but two aspects are almost always exhibited. First, while pastors realize their central task is “. . . to prepare God’s people for works of service . . .” (Eph 4:12), most remain reluctant to release their people in ministry. Second, lay people say they want to serve, but remain unwilling to prioritize their time for ministry. In the world of the twenty-first century people appear to have less time to be involved in ministry. Burgeoning economies in many countries require multiple incomes to live as costs of living increase. The expansion of activities to which people can be committed competes for a place in the schedules of many post moderns. Clearly, much remains to be accomplished in understanding how to empower and recruit persons in ministry in the twenty-first century.

In the post modern world the issue of preparing people for works of service becomes even more difficult. In the modern world lay ministry meant simply recruiting, training, and deploying people in programs where they served the church and their communities. In the post modern world the mission of pastors also includes the preparation of people for the emerging global conversation. Such global conversation can take place with a neighbor who comes from a different cultural context, across the Internet with an unbeliever half a world away, or in traditional cross-cultural venues. But make no mistake; global conversations are taking place. Lay ministry is no longer mono-cultural. A better way of looking at lay ministry today is that everyone is a cross cultural missionary to some extent. This makes recruiting, training, and deploying laity a touch more difficult.

Research Issues

Biblical church growth in the twenty-first century will be found in churches that discover ways to move people from the pew to ministry so they are ready to give an answer for their faith in the global conversation. Research issues related to this principle include...

- Is it possible to build a globally accessible recruiting, training, and coaching network via the Internet?

- How can we recruit people into ministry when it takes more hours to earn a living? How do we educate people to reorder their lifestyles and timetables to be available for ministry?
- How do we encourage lay persons in wealthier nations to free themselves from a consumer mindset and put God's mission first in their lives?
- What is the best way to train people for effective witness in the global conversation?

Conclusion

God wants His church to grow! What a challenge!! What an opportunity!!! God has graciously allowed us to have a part in the process of bringing people to His community of faith. The key issues remain essentially the same as before: How do we communicate the gospel to lost persons? How do we fold new believers into local churches? How do we aid believers in their spiritual development? Yet, the answers to these questions in the postmodern world of the twenty-first century are likely to be significantly different. Church structures must change. Communication approaches must be revised. Receptive portions of the cultural mosaic must be targeted. It is up to us in the church to respond appropriately. May God find us faithful!

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