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In the 1970's, Donald McGavran's Church Growth movement emerged in the service of a powerful theological vision: to fulfill the ancient promise to Abraham—that all of the earth's peoples would be blessed, and to fulfill Christ's Great Commission—to reach, and make disciples, among the lost peoples of the earth. Church Growth's people, however, have never "majored" in Constructive Theology. With most other Christians, we regard Christianity as a revealed (not an imagined) faith; most of us affirm the classical theology of the Church, with deep roots in the Scriptures and normative respect for the several ancient creeds. So Church Growth leaders have not presumed to "improve" on "the faith once delivered to the saints!"

Furthermore, Church Growth people usually identify with one of the great Protestant theological traditions—such as Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, Anabaptist, Restorationist, or Pentecostal. Moreover, because Church Growth is a field within the broader discipline of Missiology, we generally share the Mission Theology of our colleagues. Church Growth has not primarily contributed to theology because theology, per se, is not our "main business", and reflective theology is not the arena for our essential contribution, nor is "speculative theology." If the reflection behind important human (including Christian) activity functions within a Theology-Strategy-Method (or a Theory-Models-Practice) spectrum, Church Growth's essential contribution is located squarely in the middle, while drawing from both theology and from field research where the practice is especially effective, with some contributions to theology and more to practice.

Specifically, the Church Growth movement's main business

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and indispensable contribution has been to discover, in that middle strategic level, answers to two profound questions. These two questions are so important that, if we devoted our main attention to Theology instead of these two questions, we would neglect our essential contribution. *Many* Christian leaders "do theology" in the service of Church and Academy; many more practice ministry with Christians and pre-Christian people. Very few Christian leaders engage the broad "middle" between theory and practice. Indeed, Church Growth thinkers address the two questions that virtually no one was even asking outside the Church Growth School of thought, much less finding answers.

The first question, reflected in the title of Donald McGavran's last major book, expresses the quest for *Effective Evangelism*. How does the gospel spread between persons, among a people, and from one people to another? How do we communicate the meaning of the gospel to people who do not even know what we are talking about? How do people become Christians? How can we help them become Christians? The communication of Christianity, with the hope that people will respond by becoming disciples, is a complex challenge for any communicator!

Believe it or not, such questions have seldom been asked in the entire history of the ministry of Evangelism, at least in the West. A very few practitioners, like John Wesley and Charles G. Finney, have observed their times and the people, interviewed converts, reflected on their ministry, asked how it could be more effective, risked innovations, and pioneered new approaches and methods, but not many. In our colleges and seminaries, teachers of scripture, church history, and theology have usually ignored such questions *in toto*. Teachers of worship, preaching, counseling, and Christian education have almost always focused on more effective ministry to Christians and the gathered churches, assuming (naively) that what engages the People of God should engage all of God's people.

In the history of the practice of evangelism in most settings, we seem to have hoped that we'd get it right the first time, because however we started out doing it is how we usually continued to do it for the next century or more! If, say, camp meetings, or revivals, or crusades, or confirmation classes, or Bible distributions, or billboards, or "the Roman Road", or radio programs, or TV programs, or distributing gospel tracts has yielded any converts, we have assumed that is *the* way to do evangelism now, and always will be! We have seldom asked McGavran's questions: "*Why* do we often come out of ripe harvest fields empty handed? Are there more *effective* ways to reach people?"

A biologist might conclude that the intellectual capacity for constructive criticism has been so tragically omitted in the genetic code of evangelicals that we are mutant members of the human species!

That is one reason why Donald McGavran's career, in the service of "Effective Evangelism", was such a significant departure. McGavran, and the academic movement within Missiology that he launched, brought the rigor of *critique* to the ministry of evangelism. With appropriate respect for what we assumed we knew, McGavran dared to ask: "We know how the gospel ought to spread, but how does it really spread? We know how people ought to become Christians, but how do they really become Christians?" McGavran, with other Church Growth people, devoted years of field research to such questions, observing Christian movements and interviewing first generation converts. The discoveries of this field research tradition did, indeed, validate some evangelical folklore, but it challenged some of it too, and produced a body of insight that is sometimes "counterintuitive." For example, Church Growth has taught us that . . .

1. The gospel spreads most contagiously, not between strangers, nor by mass evangelism, nor through mass media, but along the lines of the kinship and friendship *networks* of credible Christians, especially new Christians.
2. The gospel spreads more easily to persons and people's who are in a *receptive* season of their lives, and Church Growth research has discovered many indicators of likely receptive people.
3. The gospel spreads more naturally among a people through their language, and the *indigenous* forms of their culture, than through alien languages or cultural forms.
4. "First generation" groups, classes, choirs, congregations, churches, and ministries, and other *new units*, are more reproductive than old established units.
5. Apostolic ministry is more effective when we target *people groups* than when we target political units or geographic areas.

Furthermore, Church Growth research has resulted in many more specific insights about Effective Evangelism. For instance, . . .

1. Most effective evangelism does not involve presenting, in the sense of a (one-way) presentation of the gospel, as much two-way *conversation*.
2. Most effective conversations about the gospel involve the meaningful *interpretation* of the gospel, with some

"tailoring" for the individual or target audience.

3. In evangelical conversations, the gospel advocate's active *listening* is as important as what the advocate says; indeed, what the advocate hears influences what he or she says.
4. Most single episodes in effective evangelism do not attempt to present the whole gospel, (which would induce "information overload"), but presents the *facet*(s) of the multi-faceted gospel most relevant to the person's, or group's, question, need, or struggle.
5. Most effective evangelism involves *multiple* conversations over time, weeks or months (or even years), rather than a single presentation or conversation.
6. Most cases of effective evangelism do not involve a single person who advocates, symbolizes, or incarnates the gospel for a seeker; *several persons* (or a group, or a whole congregation) serve as a person's bridges into faith, reminiscent of Paul's report that "I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase."
7. So understood, evangelism is a *process*, rather than a single event, that the Holy Spirit is orchestrating in the life of a person or a people group (in which we are privileged, episodically, to be involved).
8. The evangelism process typically involves (say) 30 *experiences over time*. Some of the many links in the chain that leads to faith and new life are experiences other than evangelical presentations or conversations—like experiencing the Holy Spirit in a worship experience, or observing a credible Christian in action, or an experience of answered prayer; as the would-be convert (say) is reflecting on Christian truth claims and biblical texts, reading books, attending Bible studies, asking questions, and trying to pray, she or he is contributing some of the links in the chain (as Charles G. Finney once observed). So the experiences that lead to faith include, but are seldom limited to, what the evangelizers do with seekers.
9. The Holy Spirit is present not only in the witnessing Christian and in the gospel transactions, but has been *preveniently* with the Seeker, preparing him or her to be receptive to the gospel and the possibility of life change. Effective evangelistic ministry builds on what the Spirit has been, and is, doing.
10. Evangelism probably includes, essentially, an appropriate *invitation* to receive and follow Christ through His Church. Though many people do not respond immedi-

ately when invited (the ball lies in their court for awhile), most people do not consider responding at all without a human invitation.

11. Often, *multiple invitations* are necessary to help the person respond; each stage in the "adoption process" takes time and, often, seekers need to know that the church really wants them.
12. Today, at least, most people do not first become believers and then become involved with the Church. More and more, "Belonging comes before Believing;" their involvement with the Church, in some form, usually comes first, and they discover faith *through* their involvement in the community of faith. So "assimilation" often precedes belief and commitment; Christian faith is often "more caught than taught."
13. Increasingly, we observe, neither the Sunday School nor the church's worship service will be the initial port of entry for many secular seekers; not even a "contemporary seekers service" will be an effective port of entry for many pagans. More and more pre-Christian people will be reached through *small groups* or through *"outreach ministries"*—such as interest groups, support groups, recovery ministries, etc. More and more, effective evangelism is "ministry based evangelism."
14. We are now aware that the essential task of evangelism is not so much the presenting of, say, traditionally faithful gospel words as the *communication* of the gospel's *meaning* to people in their context.
15. We are now much more aware that the communication process is enormously more of *complex* than merely the accurate "presenting" of faithful information; communication involves such factors as the perceived credibility of the witnesser (and the witnessing community), the "body language" of the communicator, the experienced relationship between the communicator and receptor, the images, attitudes, and feelings the receptor brings to transactions, whether the receptor feels respected and understood, the cultural relevance of the church's style, language, aesthetics, and music, the emotional impressions created by the music and architecture, how interesting we unpack the Possibility, and a host of other known (and unknown) communication variables.

Most of all, perhaps, Church Growth research has demonstrated that there is no one approach or method of evangelism, which, like a stretch sock, will fit every situation! Rather, the

Church Growth perspective teaches Christian leaders how to discover, in the context that God entrusts to them, the available means to engage the people, communicate the message, and invite response. So the Church Growth field exists to inform Effective Evangelism.

The second essential issue that Church Growth addresses, that virtually everyone else ignores, is Mission Strategy. How do we make cross-cultural mission both faithful and effective? The task of serving, engaging, communicating the gospel, and planting and expanding the Christian movement in a very different cultural population is even more complex than Evangelism within the advocate's culture. Compared to intra-cultural evangelism, mission history does feature more leaders engaging in critique and strategic thinking. Names like Patrick, Gregory, Boniface, Bartholomew de Las Casas, Robert de Nobili, Matteo Ricci, William Carey, Rufus Anderson, Henry Venn, and Roland Allen come to mind. Yet many of these strategic mission thinkers were ignored in their own time; or, following a season of influence, their own missions reverted to business as usual. Moreover, mission history reveals extended periods in which little (or no) strategic thinking was done, and enduring tragedies like the Crusades and Western Colonialism resulted.

Church Growth, however, has contributed such a substantial strategic perspective to the minds of informed mission leaders that the situation may now be permanently altered for the better! This suggestion can be confirmed by perusing the most recent (1999) third edition of *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. This collection, now almost 800 pages, contains 124 articles divided into four sections: The Biblical Perspective, The Historical Perspective, The Cultural Perspective, and The Strategic Perspective. The number of articles in The Strategic Perspective section now equals the number in any two of the other three sections, and some articles placed in the other sections (such as several by Ralph Winter) could easily have been placed in the Strategy section.

One cannot account for this much attention to mission strategy in the new *Perspectives* book, and in much other mission literature, apart from the paradigm level influence of the Church Growth movement. McGavran taught the Missional Church to love the Lord of the Harvest with their minds as well as their hearts, and he thereby introduced a quiet revolution in the minds of many people who are seriously devoted to Christian Mission. A great number of mission leaders today devote enormously more attention than their predecessors to strategic mission questions like the following:

1. What is our essential *mission*, our main business, our driving purpose?
2. Within this mission, what are our *objectives*, and our priorities within those objectives?
3. What are the core values, beliefs, convictions, experiences, and stories that define our *Identity*?
4. To, and with, what *people* are we in mission?
5. What *cultural* patterns have shaped them, and how do we relate to those patterns?
6. What *religious* worldview(s) and experiences have shaped them, and how do we respond to those influences?
7. What else must we know about the *Context* for Mission?
8. What *approaches*, ministries, and methods will effectively serve and reach them?
9. How shall we *Organize* for mission? Who makes Strategic Decisions? What Policies will advance, rather than frustrate, this mission?
10. What *Personnel* do we need to deploy in mission? What physical resources do they need? What are the sources for the needed human and financial resources?

In time, mission leaders often address other, long ignored, indispensable strategic questions, like:

11. How do we monitor progress, *evaluate* our mission, and make mid-course corrections?
12. How will *relationships* between the Sending Church, the Mission, and the Younger Church be defined?
13. What approaches, programs, and ministries are no longer reproductive and should be jettisoned, thereby freeing time and resources for more productive action?

Those questions, of course, are not exhaustive, and each question is an umbrella for more specific questions. Though the revolution that began with Peter Drucker in understanding organizations and their effective management and leadership has undoubtedly impacted mission leaders, McGavran and his Church Growth school have contributed to strategic mission thinking more than all other identifiable ecclesial sources combined. More important, Church Growth research has explored the range of options available within each major question, and has suggested which options are more usually effective. In response to the generic questions, for example, like "How shall we *Organize* for mission?" and "Who makes Strategic Decisions?" Church Growth research has demonstrated that decentralized mission organizations are usually more effective than centralized mission organizations, and strategic decisions made by field

leaders are usually more effective than strategic decisions made at headquarters.

In practice, of course, the two issues of effective evangelism and mission strategy are not the "only" mid-range issues requiring the attention of Church Growth research and reflection. Three other issues have, rightly, captured the priority attention of some Church Growth people. 1) Since, with increasing numbers of receptive people, we get in ministry with them first, and then in conversation, Church Growth needs to inform "effective outreach ministries." 2) More Church Growth people, today, need to recover the movement's early interest in Christian Movements. 3) Much of our research in effective evangelism, effective outreach ministries, mission strategy, and Christian movements will, undoubtedly, address the crucial variable of Effective Leadership.

Nevertheless, the two issues of effective evangelism and mission strategy have constituted the priority province of most of the Church Growth thinking that matters, and the movement has made its most enduring contribution in those two areas. Furthermore, it would be fatuous to assume we had "answered" the Strategic questions and could now "move on" to other matters. Church Growth's achievement, to date, is not in the same league with the "pure sciences", which are now so close to mapping the universe, cracking the human genetic code, arriving at a "Theory of Everything," etc., that some science writers now predict "the End of Science;" one day, they predict, scientists may have few remaining unanswered questions on their plate!

Church Growth is much more like the behavioral sciences, whose leaders acknowledge that their fields are in late childhood or early adolescence. Behavioral scientists have discovered many specific insights, but they have fathomed few questions deeply. Most of their Big Discoveries still wait; many of their Important Issues, already identified, will challenge researchers for generations to come, and the emergence of an overarching macro-theory about human behavior in society is nowhere in sight. One day, through continued field research and reflection with other disciplines, we will know enormously more than we know now, but that day is nowhere in sight.

So, Church Growth people have no compelling reason to shift from Strategy to Theology as our main business. NEVERTHELESS, the Church Growth movement has contributed, at the level of many specific insights, to the Christian Movement's theological understanding. Some of our insights about Christian Conversion and Christian Experience were suggested, above, in the list of Church Growth's discoveries about

Effective Evangelism. One article does not permit an encyclopedic report on Church Growth's theological contribution, but our contributions in two areas of Christian doctrine, anthropology and ecclesiology, are notable.

Church Growth has contributed to the Church's theological *anthropology*, i.e., its doctrine of human nature. Western theologians, trapped in the paradigm of Western Individualism, have generally perceived all humanity has a vast aggregation of six billion individuals who matter to God, for whom Christ died. Church Growth people, reading in Matthew 28 that Christ commissioned the Church to go and make disciples among *panta ta ethne*, have substantially recovered the understanding of the Scriptures (and of most of the world's cultures) that most people have enough of a corporate identity that we are commissioned to target the clans, tribes, castes, and other social groups that shape their people's identity. In Ralph Winter's metaphor, Church Growth Missiologists have taught much of the Church to view people not as "atoms," but as "molecules."

Church Growth reflection upon the biblical metaphor of the "harvest" has produced significant insight into human nature. Prior to Church Growth, much of Protestant Christianity was divided between the Calvinist-Reformed tradition and the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition. John Calvin's immense logical mind had framed the debate and reached one possible conclusion. Calvin regarded the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God as the major premise of his theological system. Calvin had also experienced God's grace as an "irresistible" force. Yet Calvin observed some of Geneva's people clearly resisting the "irresistible" grace of a "Sovereign" God. Rigorous logic led him to conclude, from those premises, that the resisters were created without the capacity to perceive and respond to Grace, i.e., they were not of the "Elect." Calvin, however, may have functioned like a photographer who assumed that his photographic subjects have always looked like they did at the time he took the photograph, and they always will.

John Wesley distanced himself from Calvin's doctrine of "double election," because of what he believed that the biblical revelation teaches about the Love of God for all people, AND because he observed many of eighteenth century England's people changing over time. Wesley anticipated Donald McGavran's observations about volatile human *receptivity*:

> Fluctuating receptivity is a most prominent aspect of human nature and society. . . . The receptivity or responsiveness of individuals waxes and wanes. No person is equally ready at all times to follow 'the Way". . . . Peo-

> ples and societies also vary in responsiveness. Whole segments of mankind resist the Gospel for periods—often very long periods—and then ripen to the Good News. . . . Missions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America also abundantly illustrate the fact that societies ripen to the Gospel at different times. . . . Sudden ripenings, far from being unusual, are common. . . . One thing is clear—receptivity wanes as often as it waxes. Like the tide, it comes in and goes out. Unlike the tide, no one can guarantee when it goes out that it will soon come back again." (*Understanding Church Growth*, 1980 edition, pp. 245-248).

McGavran's longtime colleague at Fuller's School of World Mission, Arthur Glasser, reports that, with such insights, "We feel we have leaped over the inscrutable mystery that down through the years has provoked endless theological debate and ecclesiastical division." From one vantage point, at least, Church Growth reflection has quietly *resolved* centuries of theological debate.

Church Growth's contribution to *ecclesiology*, or the doctrine of the Church, has been extensive. Among Protestant Evangelicals, Church Growth people are somewhat unusual for taking the Church seriously, for having a "high" doctrine of the Church, or for even *having* a doctrine of the Church! (Many evangelicals seem to regard the Church as more or less optional.) Moreover, Church Growth people stand among the minority of Protestants who seem to affirm Augustine's conclusion that "There is no salvation outside the Church." Our reasons contrast with Augustine's, however; we simply observe, as a practical matter, that virtually no one experiences forgiveness, justification, second birth, or sanctification, nor discovers the will of God and the power to live it out, apart from communities of faith. So, for soteriological reasons, Church Growth scholars have defined a person's incorporation into the Body of Christ as a necessary phase of his or her conversion, and we have championed new church planting as an essential feature of evangelization and mission.

Furthermore, Church Growth people take the empirical Church seriously; we actually study churches, and movements of churches, warts and all; and that data, with biblical and theological data, helps shape and nuance our understanding of the Body of Christ. Most theologies of the Church, from the pens of "desk theologians," discuss the Church as a theoretical abstraction, removed from any study of, or any cases of, or any reference to, any actual churches! In *Leading and Managing a Growing*

Church (Abingdon: 2000, pp. 21-24) I take issue with desk ecclesiology, within an attempt to demonstrate that the Church is, after all, an organization—requiring leadership and management, but a unique organization.

> Some church leaders resist insights from the literatures of leadership, management, and organization effectiveness because, they say, "The Church is *different*. The church isn't an organization; it is an Organism—the Body of Christ. Christ is its head, He is the Leader, and we are called to run the church on *spiritual* principles, not the principles of Madison Avenue and the corporate world."

This "spiritual" perspective on the Church does contain a crucial perspective on this matter. The Church is, or should be, different from McDonalds, Sears, Rotary, GM, IBM, MIT, and P&G. Ignoring the fact that each of those seven organization are very different from the other six, five things (at least) do make the Church a different kind of organization: 1) The Church has a distinct Source. Christ built it, on the rock of faith in Him as Messiah and risen Lord, to be the New Israel, the Body of Christ, and the extension of His incarnation. 2) From the ancient apostles, the Church has a distinct message—the gospel. That is why Leander Keck, former dean of Yale Divinity School, coaches church leaders to "Spend your life offering the gospel to the world, because it is the only thing we have to offer the world that it doesn't already have." 3) The Church has a distinct Purpose—to reach the peoples of the earth, to help them become reconciled to God, liberated from their sins, restored to God's purpose, and deployed in God's wider mission seeking health, peace, justice, and salvation for all people and (some would add) all creation. 4) Through such sources as the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor, the Church is given the Ethic that should limit, shape, and focus how Christians do Kingdom business. 5) As "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit," not much else that is supremely important in our total mission is likely to succeed without Third Person power behind, attending, and blessing our efforts.

Though the Church is a different kind of organization, however, it is still an organization. In common with other organizations, the Church is an interdependent aggregation of people with some shared history, identity, and culture, who pull together in coordinated activities to achieve the organization's objectives. Granting its distinctive source, message, mission, ethic,

and reliance, churches nevertheless have much in common with other organizations, particularly other voluntary organizations. When churches achieve their objectives, many of the reasons are the same as when other kinds of organizations achieve their objectives. If it helps to know, much of the best literature on leadership and management is written by devoted Christians, such as Peter Drucker and Ken Blanchard. Nevertheless, there is no "Christian" body of management theory any more than there is a "Christian" grammar, or a "Christian" arithmetic, or a "Christian" chemistry, or a "Christian" way to train for the decathlon. Presumably, Christians who are effectively in the world (while no longer of it) will connect subjects and predicates, or calculate the square root of a number, or measure and mix a solution, or prepare for a shot put competition more or less like anyone else.

Occasionally, I meet church leaders who deny all of this. I have concluded, reluctantly, that they may be "heretics"—harboring a *Docetic Ecclesiology*! That glib charge warrants an explanation! In the first centuries of Christianity, some Christians were influenced by a Greek philosophy called Gnosticism. Gnostic believed that matter, and particularly the human body, are Evil. Gnostic Christians believed, therefore, that in the Incarnation God did not really take on human flesh, and He could not possibly have suffered on the cross; he only appeared to be human, and he only appeared to suffer, like an actor playing a role in a salvation drama. FitzSimons Allison, in *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Morehouse Publishing; 1994, pp. 27-28) explains their view and their label:

> The Docetists found it incomprehensible that Jesus could have actually suffered. They answered the essential questions about him by insisting that he only *appeared* to suffer, to weep, to thirst, to hunger, to sweat in agony, and to die, and that his incarnate human state was so spiritual that he only appeared to be human. (Docetism is derived from the word *dokein*, which means 'to seem, to appear'.)

The Council of Nicea branded this view a serious heresy, and affirmed that Jesus Christ was indeed "made man," "was crucified," "suffered and was buried." The Council insisted that Jesus took on our full humanity because, in the words of ancient theologians—"What he did not assume, he could not save," and, "He became as we are, that we might become like Him."

Docetism is still with us, in several forms, but "docetic ecclesiology" may be a new form. As the old Docetism claimed that Jesus' body was not a real human body, though it appeared to

be, *docetic ecclesiology maintains that the Church, the Body of Christ, is not a real human organization, though it appears to be*. An orthodox doctrine of the church, however, would affirm the Church's full humanity. As Jesus' body was a real human body—as any physician checking for a pulse or blood pressure could have affirmed, so the Body of Christ is a real human organization—reflecting many of the same dynamics, and managed by many of the same principles, we find in other organizations. The Church, because of its distinct source, message, mission, ethic, and reliance, is a different kind of organization than Honda or Harvard, but an organization nevertheless. The most effective Christian leaders will be informed both by what we know about organizations and by what we know about churches

Church Growth's most significant recent contribution to ecclesiology is located in the vague "no man's land" between theology and method, involving issues like the shape of the local church, and what it means to *be* the People of God in the world, and to "do church" in a changing world, as well as the local church's basic approach to building Christian disciples and reaching pre-Christian people. McGavran invested little energy on this topic per se. He, with the rest of us, was asking how existing churches could grow; how they "did church" was often an unexamined "given." More recent research and reflection, however, by people within, or close to, his tradition have advanced our knowledge of how churches that intend to be "apostolically serious" will "do church."

For instance, Ralph Neighbour's *Where Do We Go From Here?* contended that the "Program Based Design" (PBD) approach to doing church is "a spent force" almost everywhere; he advocates the "cell based" model as the proven way to meet people's relational and support needs. It is no accident, he suggests, that 19 of the 20 largest churches on earth are cell-based churches. Dale Galloway, in *20/20 Vision: How To Create a Successful Church*, suggests, from The Acts of the Apostles, that a twofold structure—small groups and the large worship assembly—reflects the normative pattern of New Testament Christianity; the idea was pioneered in the planting of New Hope Community Church in Portland, Oregon which, in time, met in over 500 lay led small groups as well as in the large weekend celebrations. Drawing from New Hope Community Church and other experiments, Carl George's *Prepare Your Church For the Future* named this the "MetaChurch" approach to being and doing church; he showed how churches "become bigger by becoming smaller," and he instructed church leaders in implementing the MetaChurch model. Such literature has influenced an unprecedented number

of churches to aspire to be churches *of* small groups (and not merely churches *with* small groups).

Some writers have featured much more than the small group piece. Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church* (Zondervan, 1995) reported and reflected upon the pioneering of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California. Bill and Lynn Hybels' *Rediscovering Church* interprets some of the struggles and insights gained in the (now) 30-year history of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. My *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon, 1996) featured the cultural relevance, small groups, lay ministries, outreach ministries, and world mission involvement that characterize the "apostolic congregations" emerging in many communities. My *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2003) featured how churches in the ancient apostolic tradition do ministry and evangelism, including an emphasis upon their outreach to allegedly "hopeless" or "impossible" people and populations.

Somewhat more specifically, Lyle Schaller observed that pioneering growing churches are no longer confining most of what they offer to a Sunday morning schedule; he projected the widespread emergence of *The Seven-Day-a-Week Church* (Abingdon, 1992). More recently, Schaller has delineated an astonishing range of specific strategic interventions for growth, in *A Mainline Turnaround: Strategies for Congregations and Denominations* (Abingdon, 2005). Gary McIntosh, in *One Size Doesn't Fit All* (Revell, 1999) coached church leaders to adapt growth strategies to their specific context. McIntosh observed that "Builders," "Boomers," and "Busters" represented three distinct generational "cultures"; in *Three Generations* (Revell, 1995) he delineated ways that some churches are reaching and serving all three generations. His more recent edition, *One Church, Four Generations* (Baker, 2002) expands the range of generation-specific insights and strategic responses.

Most of the writers who are now trying to understand a more "apostolic" way of doing church have recognized that the European State-Church way of doing church is now a spent force—in most of Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in the "imported from Europe" denominations that once crossed The Pond. Linus Morris, for instance, discovered a heart for pre-Christian peoples of Europe. Morris observed that the established hierarchical and clergy-centered "state churches" of Europe, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, or Anglican, were essentially perpetuating centuries-old ways of doing church amidst vastly changed, and changing, European cultures. The established Churches were failing to engage the populations

around them, or to demonstrate Christianity's relevance to the needs of people, or to achieve any notable "impact" in many people's lives. Morris reflected his way into an alternative model, first described in *The High Impact Church* (Touch Publications, 1993). In Amsterdam and a dozen other European cities, his Christian Associates International has planted congregations to demonstrate some known ways of doing church that can impact people. Through "Kingdom eyes," and "breakthrough thinking" a church can be driven by the supreme Purpose of reaching lost people through the deployment of its laity in ministry, witness, and leadership.

The present writer began observing, by the early 1990's, two facts that argued for new ways of "doing church": (1) Most of the members of traditional churches almost never engage in ministry, witness, and invitation with pre-Christian people, and (2) your average traditional church now fits the surrounding (changed) culture so badly that you cannot graft a good evangelism program onto that traditional church and expect anything to happen for more than a season. I wondered "why" until I started asking one question: "What is the average traditional church counting on to build people into Christians who reach out? Remembering Yogi Berra's suggestion that "You can observe a lot by watching," I observed and interviewed in many traditional churches, many weekends a year, for two years. Slowly, I discovered that (at least) eight of ten traditional churches count on the following formula for building and deploying laity. They want people to:

1. Attend church (and sit and listen).
2. Attend Sunday School (and sit and listen).
3. Attend church programs (and sit and listen).
4. Have a daily devotional.
5. Have occasional conversation and prayer with the pastor.

I could find no cases in which that model was producing, in the 1990's, its fair share of "apostles, prophets, saints, and martyrs." In time, I discovered some churches across the land whose people do reach out. Somewhat like the ancient apostles and their churches, these "apostolic congregations" target a pre-Christian population and reaching them is their "main business." *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon, 1996) and *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2003) contend (in part) that churches featuring cultural relevance, small groups, lay ministries, outreach ministries, and world mission involvement thereby build people who are enormously more likely to engage in apostolic activity than the de-

mographically similar members of the traditional church down the street.

C. Peter Wagner, by the early 1990's, was observing that traditional denominationalism was largely a spent force, but many "post-denominational," independent, charismatic churches, as well as some churches attached to denominations but "coloring outside the lines," were growing by doing church in innovative ways. In *ChurchQuake* (Regal, 1999, and more recently in *The New Apostolic Churches* and *Changing Church*), Wagner heralded a "new apostolic reformation." A movement of "new wineskin" churches is raising the standard of local outreach, church planting, mercy ministries, cross-cultural mission, and financial stewardship through vision, "plugged-in worship", and lay ministries, and through an unprecedented exchange of ideas and energy through "apostolic networks."

So the Church Growth movement has made, and continues to make, some contribution to the Church's theological understanding. Theology is not the main arena for Church Growth's contribution. Church Growth people, to my knowledge, have not substantially contributed to the doctrines of the Trinity, or Creation, or Christology, or Redemption, or History. As we engage in field research and reflection related to our priority Strategic concerns, however, we do stimulate insight in areas like Christian conversion and experience, human nature, and the understanding of the Church and its Mission. Since, as McGavran reminded us often, "It is God's will that His Church grow, that His lost children be found," Church Growth's appropriate contribution to theology will continue.

I sometimes wonder, however, whether the Church Growth movement is mature enough to engage in theological self-critique. The theologians who have critiqued Church Growth have usually misunderstood the movement and its main business and we have, legitimately, complained; yet we are not conspicuous for doing our own theological critique. In the years that The American Society for Church Growth published *Strategies for Today's Leader*, for example, *why* were the book reviews supposed to contain no critique of the book being reviewed? Or, why do we mute any critique when, in our honest judgment, a colleague has promoted mere theological speculation in the name of Church Growth? Or, in an age when Christian Schwarz' *Natural Church Development* trashes the Church Growth movement while passing off some of the Church Growth's enduring themes and conclusions *as new and original insights*, why has our critique been muted?

Similarly, why do we never critique any growing churches?

Some public critics have charged that "growing churches," especially "mega-churches," are presenting "cheap grace," or "prosperity gospel," or generic spirituality, or nationalistic chauvinism in Christian clothing. We have been quicker to defend churches for which such charges are untrue than to expose churches for which the charges may have some validity. We have acknowledged, as an abstraction, that some "growth" is like fat, or even cancer, on the Body and does not represent the growth of the True Church. We know this, but do we ever say dissuade our readers from copying bad growth? As Charles Van Engen has reminded us, we want the growth of "the True Church."

Again, why are all the most famous "mega-church" pastors immune from critique within Church Growth circles? Sue Erikson Bloland, a therapist and the daughter of Eric Erikson, wrote on "Fame: The Power and Cost of a Fantasy" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (November, 1999). She reflects, with pain, on the changes, emptiness, and dysfunctional effects experienced in her family when her father became a "celebrity" in the 1950's. She has studied, ever since, the origins of "fame" and what it does to people. Almost always, she reports, the celebrity is compensating for insecurity by cultivating a larger-than-life appearance, and the public image is almost always at variance with what the person is really like. It is possible, of course, that this pathology has NOT completely bypassed the tall-steeple pastors of this land, and others. Many perceptive Christians (outside of our school of thought) believe that they perceive pathology in at least a few mega-churches and their famous pastors. If we abandoned our de-facto denial of this possibility, we might gain some academic credibility! Much more important, the Church Growth movement would be leading the way in discriminating between desirable and undesirable growth, and we would be more effective in discovering the reproducible approaches to missional leadership that are congruent with the gospel, and its personal and social ethic.

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