

trying to keep them clean, not realizing that they are already dirty. It is commonly a forgotten lesson that in the very land where Marx studied the conditions of the working class and forged the notion of revolution as the only way to change, his doctrine could not be applied. A spiritual revival brought also an alignment of the Christians with the poor and the oppressed, not only a sentimental alignment but a definite political and social alignment for change. Contrariwise, it was in those countries where Christians as a majority aligned themselves with the powerful or else refused to let their influence be felt in a transforming way upon the masses, where violent revolution finally became the only political alternative. This is not a rule without exception, of course.

Moreover, for the time being, Christian resources are concentrated in the Western nations and if they are going to be mobilized for the missionary task, the need for Christians to become aware of the complex issues and the ambiguities by which the missionary task is surrounded has to be taken seriously. I hope that the same eagerness and use of technology which is used to give us figures of populations in need could be used to clarify, as far as possible, the unique character of the Christian message as different from what we call today Western culture. I have found the younger generation of North American evangelical students far more aware of world issues and problems than some of the leaders who forge the policies of mission boards. May the Spirit give us ears to hear what he is saying through the impatience and critical attitude of youth. May our structures not crush missionaries before the end of their first term but be flexible to change as New Testament structures were.

We live in a fallen world which is trapped in injustice and sin, and what happens at the political and financial level is what also happens in our own personal daily life. I see sin in East and West, corruption in North and South. We have come to a point in history in which it could be said that if a world war comes, none of the parties will be "defending Christianity." The idea of a "holy war" is absurd and untenable for me in 1974. Because of this, I think that in this Congress we should come as *brothers and sisters* from among all nations, who live in a hostile world where we have been called to be salt and light. We come here to encourage one another in the task of evangelization. We come here to encourage one another in the difficult task of living as sheep among the wolves everywhere, and not to defend our governments or our social and political way of life. There is very little that can be defended in this world today! As part of this mutual encouragement, we reaffirm our hope that the Kingdom may come soon in fullness. But as an evidence of that hope we should also reaffirm our willingness to be the community of disciples of Christ which tries to demonstrate in the context of development or underdevelopment, affluence or poverty, democracy or dictatorship, that *there is a different way* for men to live together dealing with passions, power, relations, inequality, and privilege; that we are not only able to proclaim that "the end is at hand" but also to encourage one another in the search to make this world a bit less unjust and cruel, as an evidence of our expectation of a new creation.

## THE CHURCH AS GOD'S AGENT IN EVANGELISM

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The Church is God's agent of evangelism. To speak of the evangelistic task without relating this to the Church is to lose the biblical perspective and develop an incomplete evangelism.

But the statement, "The Church is God's agent of evangelism" can be either a meaningless cliché or a profound insight — depending on how the words "church" and "evangelism" are understood. The aim of this paper is to ask how the Bible presents the Church, and what it means biblically to say the Church is God's agent of evangelism.

The Church is the *only* divinely-appointed means for spreading the the Gospel<sup>1</sup>. As Melvin Hodges has written, "The Church is God's agent in the earth — the medium through which he expresses himself to the world. God has no other redeeming agency in the earth."<sup>2</sup> Further, evangelism makes little sense divorced from the fact of the Christian community. The evangelistic call is a call to *something*, and that "something" is more than a doctrine or an experience or the exercise of faith or even, narrowly, Jesus Christ. The evangelistic call intends to call persons to the *Body of Christ* — the community of believers, with Jesus Christ as its essential and sovereign head<sup>3</sup>.

I shall attempt to show how the Church is God's agent of evangelism by responding to three questions: first, what is the Church, biblically understood? second, how does the biblical Church grow? and finally, what insights for church structure emerge from this understanding of Church and evangelism?

### PART ONE: THE CHURCH BIBLICALLY UNDERSTOOD

The Bible says the Church is nothing less than the Body of Christ. It is the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9); the flock of God (I Pet. 5:2); the living temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). Virtually all biblical figures for the Church emphasize an *essential, living love relationship* between Christ and his body. This underscores the overwhelming importance of the Church in God's plan and reminds us that "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). If the Church is the *body* of Christ — the means of the Head's action in the world — then it is an essential part of the Gospel, and ecclesiology is inseparable from soteriology.

#### 1. Traditional views of the Church

The biblical view of the Church may be contrasted with two traditional views which correspond roughly to the "visible church" — "invisible church" distinction<sup>4</sup>.

a. *The institutional view* identifies the "visible" institutional structure with the essence of the Church and makes no significant distinction be-

tween the two. Thus most denominations are called churches, and in practice "church" and "denomination" mean the same thing.

There may be nothing wrong with calling denominations or institutional structures "churches" — but *this is not what the Bible means by "church."* When Paul or Peter or Jesus Christ say "church," they clearly do not refer to an institution or organization<sup>5</sup>.

b. In contrast, *the mystical view* puts the Church far above space, time, and sin as an ethereal reality comprising all true believers in Christ and known only to God. This view is a little like Plato's theory of ideas — what we see may be imperfect, but a perfect Church exists invisibly.

There is, of course, an invisible church — or rather, the true Church of Christ surpasses visible reality. But *this is not what the Bible normally means by "church"*<sup>6</sup>. There may be an invisible church, but this mystical conception is not very helpful in understanding the life and growth of the Church on earth and in history.

Both these views have one thing in common: *they fail to take culture seriously.* In the institutional view the Church becomes so wedded to its particular culture that the culturally-determined nature of much of its life and structure is unperceived. Thus the Church becomes culture-bound. This creates problems especially when cultures change or when cross-cultural evangelism is attempted.

In the mystical view, however, the Church floats nebulously *above culture* and never becomes involved in the limiting dimensions of space, time, and history. Cultural factors — which affect theology, structures, and evangelism — are not taken into account.

Thus both the institutional view and the mystical view are inadequate. Both cloud the clear biblical meaning of the Church — one by too close an identification with culture, the other by removing itself from culture. In both cases it is really culture which becomes "invisible."

To understand the Church biblically we must move beyond the traditional visible-invisible conception and move back to the prior and more fundamental biblical view. We must take the Church seriously in such a way that space, time, and history (the dimensions of culture) are also taken seriously.

## 2. The biblical view of the Church

In contrast to traditional views, the Bible describes the Church in the midst of culture, struggling to maintain its fidelity while tainted by the corrosive oils of paganism and Jewish legalism. This view of the Church is sharply relevant for the modern age.

a. *The Bible sees the Church in historical-cosmic perspective.* Scripture places the Church at the very center of God's cosmic purpose. This is seen most clearly in Paul's writings, and particularly in the book of Ephesians. Paul was concerned to speak of the Church as the result of, and within the context of, the plan of God for his whole creation (Eph. 1:9-10, 1:20-23, 3:10, 6:12)<sup>7</sup>.

What is this cosmic plan? According to Ephesians, it is *that God may glorify himself by uniting all things in Christ through the Church*<sup>8</sup>. The key idea here is clearly *reconciliation* — not only the reconciliation of men to God, but the reconciliation of all things, "things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Central to this plan is the reconciliation of

man to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. But the reconciliation Christ brings extends to all the alienations that resulted from the Fall — between man and himself, between man and man, and between man and his physical environment. As mind-boggling as the thought is, Scripture teaches that this reconciliation even includes the redemption of the physical universe from the effects of sin as everything is brought under proper headship in Jesus Christ<sup>9</sup>.

Paul emphasizes *individual and corporate personal salvation* through Christ, and then goes on to place personal salvation in cosmic perspective (Eph. 1:3-23; Col. 1:3-20). The redemption of man is the center of God's plan, but it is not the *circumference* of that plan. Paul alternates between a close-up view and a long-distance view, for the most part focusing on the close-up of personal redemption, but periodically changing to a long-distance, wide-angle view that takes in "all things" — things visible and invisible; things past, present, and future; things in heaven and things on earth; all the principalities and powers — the whole historical-cosmic scene<sup>10</sup>.

According to Ephesians 3:10, the Church is the earthly *agent* of the cosmic reconciliation God wills<sup>11</sup>. This means the Church's mission is broader than evangelism. Evangelism is the *center* of the Church's role as agent of reconciliation, and therefore is the *first priority* of the Church's ministry in the world. But the mission of the Church extends to reconciliation and "substantial healing" in other areas as well<sup>12</sup>. To the extent the coming of the Kingdom of God takes place in space-time history before the return of Christ, God's plan is to be accomplished through the Church.

b. *The Bible sees the Church in charismatic, rather than institutional, terms.* According to the New Testament, the Church is a charismatic organism, not an institutional organization. The Church is the result of the grace (Greek, *charis*) of God. It is through grace that the Church is saved (Eph. 2:8), and through the exercise of spiritual gifts of grace (*charismata*) that the Church is edified (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:7-16; I Cor. 12:4-8, 14:1-5; I Pet. 4:10-11). "According to Scripture, the Church is a charismatic community"<sup>13</sup>.

God gives his gracious gift of salvation on the basis of Christ's work and through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This provides the basis of the Church's community life. The pure light of God's "manifold grace"<sup>14</sup> is then refracted as it shines through the Church, as light through a prism, producing the varied, many-colored *charismata*, or gifts of the Spirit. This provides the basis for the Church's diversity within unity. The Church is edified through the exercise of spiritual gifts as "the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied . . . makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).

This is important for evangelism, because the New Testament relates evangelism to spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11-12). In order for the Church to be alive and growing, it must be based on a *charismatic model*, not an *institutional model*.

The question of a charismatic or institutional model for church life and structure is becoming urgent in contemporary society. Technological development, the population explosion, and other factors are speeding

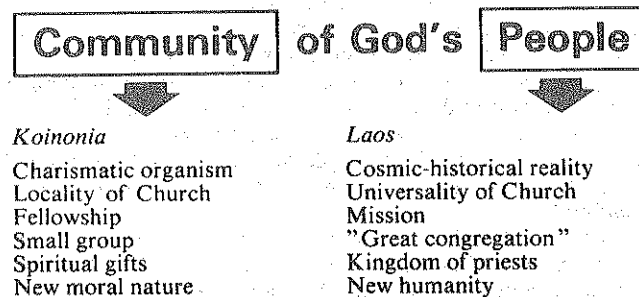
up the pace of change and squeezing humanity into a potential global ghetto. This acceleration puts new strains on all institutional structures. Alvin Toffler analyzes these trends in his book *Future Shock* and argues that "the acceleration of change has reached so rapid a pace that even bureaucracy can no longer keep up." This means that "newer . . . more instantly responsive forms of organization must characterize the future." We are seeing the "collapse of hierarchy" as "shortcuts that by-pass the hierarchy are increasingly employed" in all kinds of organizations. "The cumulative result of such small changes is a massive shift from vertical to lateral communications systems"<sup>16</sup>.

Whether this is good or bad for the Church depends on whether the Church is structured according to a charismatic or an institutional model. Biblically, it is clear that the Church *should* be structured charismatically, and any church so structured is already largely prepared to withstand "future shock." But churches which are encased in rigid, bureaucratic, institutional structures may soon find themselves trapped in culturally-bound forms which are fast becoming obsolete<sup>16</sup>.

c. *The Bible sees the Church as the community of God's people.* The essential biblical figures of body and bride of Christ, household, temple, or vineyard of God, and so forth, give us the basic idea of the Church. But these are metaphors and not a definition. I believe the most biblical definition is to say *the Church is the community of God's people*<sup>17</sup>. The two key elements here are the Church as a *people*, a new race or humanity, and as a *community* or fellowship.

"People" and "community" are two poles which together make up the biblical reality of the Church (Figure 1). On the one hand, the Church is the people of God — a concept with rich Old Testament roots which underlines the objective fact of God's acting throughout history to call and prepare "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (I Pet. 2:9; cf. Exod. 19:5-6). The Greek word for "people" is *laos*, from which come the Latin *laicus* and the English "laity"<sup>18</sup>. This reminds us that the *whole* church is a "laity," a people. Here the emphasis is on the *universality* of the Church — God's people scattered throughout the world in hundreds of specific denominations, movements, and other structures. *Seen in cosmic-historical perspective, the Church is the people of God.*

Figure 1. THE CHURCH AS THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE



On the other hand, the Church is a community of fellowship, a *koinonia*. This more-New-Testament emphasis grows directly out of the experience of Pentecost. If peoplehood underlines the continuity of God's plan from Old to New Testament, community calls attention to the "new covenant," the "new wine," the "new thing" God did in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Spirit's baptism at Pentecost. The emphasis here is on the *locality* of the Church in its intense, interactive common life. *Seen as a charismatic organism, the Church is the community of the Holy Spirit.*

The Church, then, is the community of God's people. It is a charismatic organism established by God as the agent of his cosmic plan for human history. It was to this Church in its inconspicuous, unpromising beginnings that Jesus Christ entrusted the Great Commission.

## PART TWO: CHURCH-CENTERED EVANGELISM

Just as all biblical figures for the Church imply life, so do they suggest growth and reproduction. It is of the nature of the Church to grow and reproduce just as God's plan has always involved the charge, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). So when we discuss evangelism, we are really asking: how does the biblical Church grow? Normal (that is, biblical) church life will normally produce church growth.

### 1. What is Church-centered evangelism?

Church-centered evangelism is evangelism which builds the Church. It springs from the life and witness of the Christian community and results in the reproduction of the community in an ongoing process.

C. Peter Wagner and others have rightly criticized views of evangelism which do not go far enough in the direction of church growth. Speaking of "presence" and "proclamation" evangelism, Wagner insists that neither is adequate, for the goal of evangelism must be persuasion. Christian *presence* must be the basis for Christian *proclamation*, which in turn must reach the goal of *persuading* men and women to come to Christ. In this view, the ultimate aim of evangelism is to make disciples<sup>19</sup>. The line of reasoning is as follows:

PRESENCE ► PROCLAMATION ► PERSUASION

But is it enough even to say the ultimate goal of evangelism is to make disciples? While making disciples certainly implies the formation and edification of the Christian community, this is only implicit, not explicit. To do justice to the biblical understanding of the Church, we must go one step further and say that *the goal of evangelism is the formation of the Christian community*<sup>20</sup>. It is making disciples and, further, forming these disciples into living cells of the Body of Christ — new expressions of the community of God's people. Church-centered evangelism is concerned, then, with propagation (in the fundamental sense of reproduction or multiplication) as well as with persuasion:

PRESENCE ► PROCLAMATION ►  
PERSUASION ► PROPAGATION

In this process, propagation or reproduction feeds into a continuous

cycle which, empowered by the Holy Spirit, makes the Church a dynamic, living organism. The goal of evangelism therefore is the formation of the Christian community, the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit. This is not a total definition of evangelism, because it does not include the many possible motives and means involved. There may be various legitimate motives for evangelism, but the goal must always be the formation of the biblical Church. This is necessary in order to reach the really ultimate goal of evangelism: the glorification of God.

## 2. How the biblical Church grows

What are the dynamics of such evangelism?

The dynamic is the Holy Spirit. Looking at the New Testament and church history, we can perceive some of the ways the Spirit works in producing church growth. I wish to emphasize particularly four factors which are essential components of growth and which are grounded in the basic biblical nature of the Church<sup>21</sup>. They are:

a. *Direct evangelistic proclamation.* The mandate for proclamation is central in God's cosmic plan, for this plan centers in what God is doing *for man* — the redemption that brings eternal salvation and builds the Church.

The Church after Pentecost evangelized irrepressibly. The great concern and dynamic of the early church was to tell the Good News about Jesus and the resurrection; to bear witness to what they had seen, heard, and experienced<sup>22</sup>.

The evangelistic task of the Church is to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ throughout the world, making disciples and building the Church (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). Evangelism is the first priority of the Church's ministry in the world for several reasons: the clear biblical mandate for evangelism; the centrality and necessity of personal conversion in God's plan; the reality of judgment; the fact that changed men are necessary to change society; the fact that the Christian community exists and expands only as evangelism is carried out. The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted.

b. *Multiplying Christian congregations.* Evangelistic proclamation is not an end in itself, however, but must lead beyond itself to making disciples. Not mere numerical growth but the multiplication of local churches is the test of a healthy, growing church. The biblical ideal is neither to produce a host of new Christians who live unattached, separated lives, nor to expand existing local churches until their membership bulges into the thousands. The biblical pattern is to form new converts into local congregations and to multiply the number of congregations as new converts are added<sup>23</sup>.

The ministry of Paul and other New Testament evangelists was a church-multiplying ministry. We know that converts in many cities quickly ran into the thousands; yet for nearly two hundred years no church buildings were erected<sup>24</sup>. Such growth under such conditions can be explained only as the multiplication of small congregations. It is not surprising, therefore, that the New Testament often refers to "the church in your (or their) house"<sup>25</sup>.

Normal growth comes by the division of cells, not by the unlimited

expansion of existing cells. The growth of individual cells beyond a certain point without division is pathological. Church growth studies verify that "only as the number of churches is multiplied does the Christian part of the overall population increase" in a given society<sup>26</sup>.

Growth comes by the multiplication of *congregations of believers*, not necessarily by the multiplication of church buildings or institutional structures. If the Church can grow only as fast as buildings are built, or pastors academically trained, or budgets expanded, then growth is limited to the resources available for these purposes. Church growth is not limited by such factors when based on biblical principles.

c. *Building the Christian community.* Even the multiplication of Christian congregations is not the final goal, however. Multiplication must lead to the edification of the Christian community in each particular case, for God's will is that "all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13).

Evangelism requires the existence of a witnessing community if church growth is to become a continuing process. As John Howard Yoder has written, "Pragmatically it is self-evident that there can be no procedure of proclamation without a community, distinct from the rest of society, to do the proclaiming. Pragmatically it is just as clear that there can be no evangelistic call addressed to a person inviting him to enter into a new kind of fellowship and learning if there is not such a body of persons, again distinct from the totality of society, to whom he can come and with whom he can learn"<sup>27</sup>.

This is true even in the most pagan society where no organized church yet exists. For even there, as soon as Christian witnesses enter the society the Church is present (Matt. 18:20), and hearers are called to join the incipient community. While one can, of course, point to some exceptions, this seems to be the normal biblical pattern<sup>28</sup>.

Protestantism in general has emphasized the individual over the community. Too often the Church has been seen more as a collection of saved souls than as a community of interacting personalities. But the model of Christ with his disciples, the example of the Early Church, and the explicit teachings of Jesus and Paul should call us back to the importance of community. Authentic Christian living is life in Christian community. Individual and corporate edification go together and should not be separated<sup>29</sup>.

Fellowship and community life are necessary in order to prepare Christians for witness and service. Every Christian is a witness in the world, but his effectiveness depends largely on his sharing the enabling common life of the Church. And this common life becomes truly enabling only as the community becomes, through the indwelling of Christ and the exercise of spiritual gifts, the *koinonia* of the Spirit<sup>30</sup>.

d. *Exercising spiritual gifts.* A primary function of Christian community is the awakening and disciplining of the gifts of the Spirit. The important discussions of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4 all place gifts in the context of the community life of the Church<sup>31</sup>.

The somewhat parallel lists of spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 are particularly important here<sup>32</sup>. Placing these two

passages side by side gives us a composite picture of church order according to biblical and charismatic principles, and suggests a functional distinction between two kinds of spiritual gifts:

<i>I Corinthians 12:28</i>	<i>Ephesians 4:11</i>
Apostles, prophets Teachers	Apostles, Prophets, Evan- gelists, Pastors, Teachers
then	for
Workers of miracles, healers, helpers, etc.	the equipment of the saints for their work of ministry

There are, first of all, the leadership gifts: Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher (assuming the addition of "evangelist" and "pastor" in Ephesians be considered the further subdividing of those designated "apostles, prophets and teachers" in I Cor. 12:28). The Spirit gives these *basic leadership gifts* primarily for instruction, order, and equipping.

But these are not the only gifts. An undetermined number of other gifts are bestowed by the Spirit. These gifts are given "for the saints' work of ministry" and include "workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators," tongues-speakers, and many others. The purpose of the basic leadership gifts is clearly "the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry" through the exercise of *their* gifts.

We have here merely a *functional distinction* between leadership gifts and the remaining gifts of ministry. We must be careful not to read the modern clergy/laity dichotomy into these passages. Prophet, teacher, evangelist, and pastor were non-technical and non-professional terms in the New Testament. There is no basis here (or elsewhere in the New Testament) for any division of the Christian community into "clergy" and "laity," since all Christians are the *laos* (people) of God and all have some "work of ministry"<sup>33</sup>.

The contemporary church needs the spiritual gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher — and God has promised to give them. These gifts are necessary in order for the Church to function biblically as the community of God's people<sup>34</sup>.

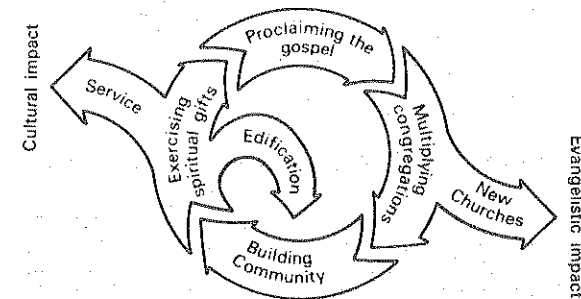
As to the gift of evangelist, it is significant that the word "evangelist" occurs only three times in the New Testament. The apparent reason for so few references is that the New Testament church did not see evangelism as primarily the work of specialists. Evangelism was the natural expression of the life of the Church. There was no need either to exhort believers to evangelize or to raise up a special class of evangelists to insure that evangelism occurred.

Why, then, does Paul even mention "evangelists" as a spiritual gift? Simply because men who were strictly evangelists, and recognized as such (as distinct from apostles and prophets, with whom they presumably had much in common) had arisen in the Church — for example, Philip. Paul recognized these men as being within "God's ecclesiology." The normal life of the Christian community will produce growth, but God

especially calls and raises up men with a particular evangelistic gift, sometimes for evangelism within the same culture and sometimes for cross-cultural evangelism. These are God's special gifts in order that new frontiers may be crossed and the Great Commission be fulfilled<sup>35</sup>.

Not only the gift of evangelist, however, but *all* spiritual gifts are relevant for evangelism in one way or another. Although not all Christians are called or gifted to be evangelists, spiritual gifts contribute to evangelism in at least five ways. First, several of the God-appointed leaders — particularly apostles, prophets, and evangelists — do essential evangelistic work in the world. Second, many individual believers use their gifts for evangelism as they are equipped spiritually to do so by the equipping ministers. Third, those who exercise the more "inward" gifts of teaching, encouragement, contributions, etc., provide the continuing spiritual support (and sometimes even economic support) for those who carry on evangelism in the world. Fourth, those who exercise their gifts within the community to sustain its inward life contribute to evangelism through the training and integration of new converts into the Church. Finally, this harmonious overall functioning of the Christian community is itself a demonstration of the truth of the Gospel and thus a witness in and to the world, preparing the way for evangelism.

Figure 2. HOW THE BIBLICAL CHURCH GROWS



In summary, the biblical Church grows through *proclaiming the Gospel, multiplying congregations, building the Christian community, and exercising spiritual gifts*. Examining these four components of growth, we see they are not isolated factors, but each contributes to the other in an ongoing cycle of edification and expansion (Figure 2). When the Church is growing biblically, Gospel proclamation leads to the multiplying of congregations. This provides the Church's major evangelistic impact in the world as new churches are formed. Within each congregation, however, true Christian community must be built. As the community "upbuilds itself in love," a kaleidoscope of spiritual gifts is awakened and begins to function. Through their gifts, believers minister outwardly to the world and inwardly to the Christian community. One result is "substantial healing" in the various areas of society; this produces a significant cultural impact. Some gifts are more directly evangelistic and thus strengthen and continue the Church's evangelistic thrust — and so the dynamic cycle of normal church growth is completed.

This cycle is what happens on the horizontal plane, as it were. Such growth is truly biblical, however, only as the Church maintains a living and vital relationship vertically with God. Thus a more complete conception of the Church's life is suggested by Figure 3. A careful evaluation of each of the elements in this diagram should reveal the weak links in the evangelistic work of any church or evangelistic organization. (Some further aspects of this fourfold analysis of church growth are suggested by the accompanying chart, Figure 4).

Figure 3. NORMAL CHURCH LIFE

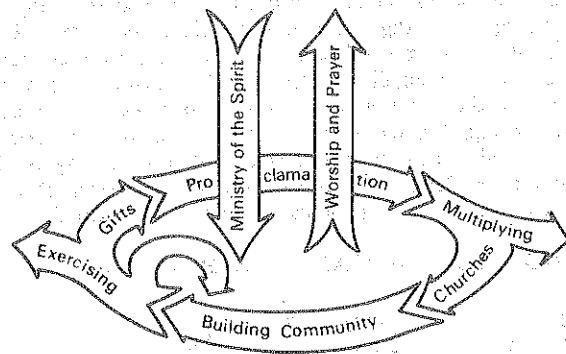


Figure 4. FOUR FACTORS IN NORMAL CHURCH GROWTH

	EVANGELISTIC PROCLAMATIONS	MULTIPLYING CONGREGATIONS	BUILDING COMMUNITY	EXERCISING GIFTS
WORDS OF CHRIST	Go into all the world and preach the Gospel — Matt. 10:15. You shall be my witnesses — Acts 1:8	Make disciples of all nations — Matt. 28:19. Jerusalem — Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth — Acts 1:8	Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded — Matt. 28:19. That they may be one as we are one — John 17:22	He who abides in me... bears much fruit — John 15:5. Greater works than these will he do — John 14:12
EXAMPLE OF CHRIST	Proclamation of the Good News	Preparation of disciples for this ministry	Community life with disciples	Jesus' preaching, healing, counseling, teaching, etc.
LIFE PRINCIPLE	Seed planting	Reproduction, cell division	Metabolism, "body life"	Vine and branch, diversity within unity
FUNCTION	Communication, gaining converts	Establishing new churches, conserving fruit, follow-up	Spiritual maturation, equipping, "perfecting," discipline	Ministry inward and outward, evangelism, fulfillment, self-expression
RELATED MOVEMENTS	Mass evangelism and personal evangelism movements	"Church Growth," some missionary movements	Renewal Movement, small-group movements	Charismatic Movement, Pentecostalism
DANGERS OF PARTIAL EMPHASIS	Lost fruit, spiritual starvation, "evangelistic technology"	Exaggerated denominationalism, "success mentality," "accommodation to the world"	Exaggerated subjectivism, self-centeredness, withdrawal from world	Exaggerated individualism, neglect of doctrine, factiousness

This is how the biblical Church grows, and this is the meaning of church-centered evangelism. To complete our analysis, however, we must now turn to the crucial question of how the biblical Church structures itself in order to grow normally.

PART THREE: STRUCTURES FOR AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH

The Bible gives very little specific guidance regarding church structure. It presents a clear picture of what the Church is intended to be and gives the early history of the Church in two cultural contexts: Palestinian Jewish society and first-century Graeco-Roman society<sup>36</sup>. On the basis of this biblical witness, the Church in each epoch forms those wineskins which seem most compatible with its nature and mission within the particular culture.

There can be no question of finding a biblical pattern for denominational structures or even for the detailed organization of the local church, for the Bible is silent here<sup>37</sup>. What we must do, therefore, is look for general principles or insights which seem to be implied by the biblical description of the Church. A church structured in harmony with the biblical understanding of the Church will, by definition, be an evangelistic church.

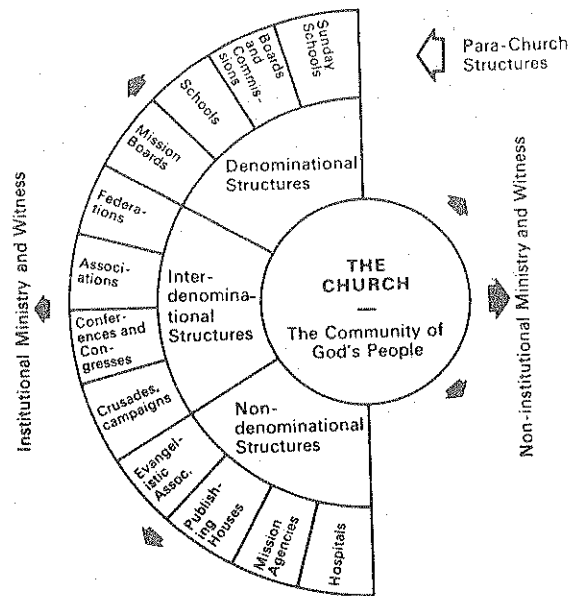
1. Church structure and para-church structures

Here we face a crucial problem. We see that biblically the Church is the community of God's people, not an organizational institution. But when we look at the contemporary church, we see not only the community of God's people; we find also a proliferation of denominations, institutions, agencies, associations, and so forth. Such structures obviously have no explicit biblical basis. How should we view them?

The two most common tendencies have been to say these structures are actually a part of the essence of the Church, and thus "sacralize" them<sup>38</sup>, or else to take an anti-institutional stance and say all such structures are invalid and must be abandoned. A more helpful option, however, is to view all such structures as *para-church structures* which exist alongside of and parallel to the community of God's people, but are not themselves the Church. They are useful to the extent they aid the Church in its mission, but are man-made and culturally determined. Whereas the Church itself is part of the new wine of the Gospel, all *para-church structures* are wineskins — useful, at times indispensable, but also subject to wear and decay.

In dealing with the whole question of church structure, then, we should make a very clear distinction between *the Church* as the community of God's people and all *para-church structures*, whether denominations, mission agencies, evangelistic organizations, educational institutions, or other ecclesiastical forms (Figure 5). It is critically important — especially when we are dealing with a worldwide, multicultural situation — to emphasize that the Church is a *people*, not an organization; it is a *community*, not an institution.

Figure 5. THE CHURCH AND PARA-CHURCH STRUCTURES



### Distinguishing Between the Wine and Wineskins

Several benefits come from this distinction between the Church and para-church structures. (i) That which is always cross-culturally relevant (the biblically-understood Church) is separated from that which is culturally bound and determined (para-church structures). Thus one is free to see the Church as *culturally relevant and involved* and yet not as *culturally bound*. (ii) One is free also to modify para-church structures as culture changes, for these are not themselves the Church and therefore are largely culturally rather than biblically determined. (iii) Finally, this distinction makes it possible to see a *wide range of legitimacy* in denominational confessions and structures. If such structures are not themselves the Church and are culturally determined, then whole volumes of controversy and polemics lose their urgency and become merely secondary. Widely varying confessions are freed (at least potentially) to concentrate on that which unites them — being the people of God and carrying out the evangelistic task — while relegating structural differences to the plane of cultural and historical relativity. Thus the crucial consideration for structure becomes not *biblical legitimacy* but *functional relevancy*.

The accompanying chart (Figure 6) suggests further implications of this distinction between the biblical Church and para-church structures.

Figure 6. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND PARA-CHURCH STRUCTURES

### The Church

1. God's creation
2. Spiritual fact
3. Cross-culturally valid
4. Biblically understood and evaluated
5. Validity determined by spiritual qualities and fidelity to Scriptures
6. God's agent of evangelism and reconciliation
7. Essential
8. Eternal
9. Divine revelation
10. Purpose to glorify God

### Para-Church Structures

1. Man's creation
2. Sociological fact
3. Culturally bound
4. Sociologically understood and evaluated
5. Validity determined by function in relation to mission of the Church
6. Man's agents for evangelism and service
7. Expendable
8. Temporal and temporary
9. Human tradition
10. Purpose to serve the Church

### 2. Guidelines for church structure

From the biblical picture of the Church we can now distill three fundamental principles for structure. I believe these principles provide a basic biblical foundation for church structure in any cultural context and help lead to effective evangelism and church growth.

a. *Leadership should be based on the exercise of spiritual gifts.* Hierarchical or organizational patterns must not be permitted to obscure or overwhelm the basic biblical pattern of charismatic (that is, Spirit-appointed and endowed) leadership.

In the New Testament, leadership was at first provided by the original eleven Apostles, and later by Paul and an expanding group of other apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, bishops, deacons, and elders<sup>39</sup>. As we have seen, the New Testament considers these spiritual gifts<sup>40</sup>. It is clear therefore that in the New Testament leadership was based on the exercise of spiritual leadership gifts which were recognized (either formally or informally) by the Church<sup>41</sup>.

All spiritual gifts should be emphasized, not just the leadership gifts. But these gifts are especially crucial, for their function biblically is precisely to awaken and prepare the other gifts (Eph. 4:11). Thus not only leadership, but the entire life of the Church is based on spiritual gifts.

b. *Secondly, the life and ministry of the Church should be built on viable large-group and small-group structures.* The early church's common life of worship, fellowship, nurture, and witness reveals a dual emphasis: "in the temple and at home" (Acts 5:42). While the community life of the Church centered primarily in the home, worship and nurture took

place both in the temple and in small house gatherings (Acts 2:42, 2:46-47, 4:34-35, 5:25, 5:42)<sup>42</sup>. Although worship in the Jewish temple eventually ceased, both large- and small-group gatherings seem to have characterized the life of the early church throughout the Mediterranean world<sup>43</sup>.

These were the two foci of early church life: the large congregation and the small group<sup>44</sup>. This was also the pattern the disciples had followed with Jesus. For two or three years Christ's disciples spent much of their time either among outdoor crowds, in the temple, or in private small-group conferences with the Master<sup>45</sup>. There was always this small-group — large-group rhythm, the small-group providing the intense community life which gave depth to the large-group gatherings.

Theologically, large- and small-group gatherings are the structural implications of the Church as the people of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As I have elsewhere suggested<sup>46</sup>, peoplehood implies the necessity of large-group gatherings while fellowship or community requires small-group structures.

Church history reveals a recurrent tendency to absolutize and institutionalize the large group, wedding it to a specific building and form, while at the same time neglecting or even condemning the small group. Virtually every major movement of spiritual renewal in the Christian Church has been accompanied by a return to the small group and the proliferation of such groups of some kind in private homes for Bible study, prayer, and the discussion of the faith<sup>47</sup>.

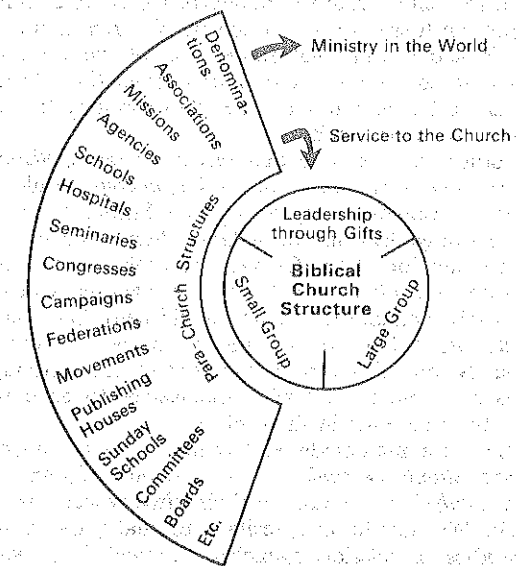
Whatever other structures may be found useful, therefore, large-group and small-group structures should be fundamental. Although the specific form of such structures may vary according to culture and circumstances, both are necessary to sustain community and witness. No other structure or form should be allowed to subvert or replace either the large corporate group or the small fellowship group<sup>48</sup>.

c. As previously suggested, a clear distinction should be made between the Church and para-church structures. Christians must see themselves as the community of God's people, not in the first place as members of an organization. In many a contemporary church this would be revolutionary.

Each church should be helped to understand that institutional structures are *legitimate* (provided they really aid the Church in its life and witness), but not *sacred*. The important thing, therefore, is not to prescribe which para-church structures should or should not exist in the Church, but to understand the relativity and limitations of such structures.

In summary, the Church as the community of God's people should be structured on spiritual gifts of leadership and on some form of large-group and small-group gatherings. Beyond this, the Church should take care to distinguish between its essential self and all para-church structures so that it does not become culture-bound — and so that, conversely, in periods of upheaval the wine is not thrown out with the wine-skins. These three principles are illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. A MODEL FOR CHURCH STRUCTURE



### 3. Implications for Cross-cultural Evangelism

Several conclusions for cross-cultural evangelism follow from the foregoing discussion.

a. *The Church as biblically presented is always cross-culturally relevant.* This is true because the Church is a cosmic-historical, charismatic organism that proceeds from divine action and transcends any particular cultural form.

b. Similarly, *the basic structures of charismatic leadership and small-group — large-group gatherings are always cross-culturally viable.* This follows from the foregoing analysis; it has also been abundantly demonstrated throughout church history and in the modern missionary age.

c. On the other hand, *para-church structures are not necessarily cross-culturally valid.* Since these are culturally determined, particular para-church structures will be transferable from one culture to another only to the extent that the two cultures are compatible. Basic adaptations will often have to be made.

d. *The exercise of spiritual gifts will result in cross-cultural evangelism.* Since the book of Acts and through the ages, God has been calling and sending out his charismatically equipped missionaries. The Antiochian pattern (Acts 13:1ff) has been repeated countless times, and will continue to be repeated until Christ returns (Matt. 24:14). It is God who calls and who gives gifts, and the gift and the call go together.

e. *The Church is itself a missionary structure, and any group of missionaries may be a legitimate embodiment of the Church.* This means there can be no question of the Church versus "missionary structures."



## LET THE EARTH HEAR HIS VOICE

Where missionaries are, there is the Church, and there missionaries are responsible to demonstrate the reality of Christian community. The real point of tension therefore is between the Church as the community of God's people and institutional expressions of the Church. Missionaries can never go to another culture and leave the Church behind! But they can, and often should, leave behind or modify the para-church forms peculiar to their own culture.

f. On the other hand, *para-church missionary/evangelistic structures should be created whenever necessary to get the job done*. While the Church is God's agent of evangelism, dynamic para-church structures can be man's agents of evangelism, useful in God's hands for the more rapid and effective propagation of the Gospel. Denominational groups should freely collaborate with other para-church organizations which are doing work they themselves cannot do, or which will help them carry on their own evangelistic work. Such organizations, however, should always be directed ultimately toward the formation of the Church (though in widely different ways), while not allowing themselves to be confused with the Church or become ends in themselves.

g. Since they are man-made and culturally determined, *all para-church structures should be subjected to continuous rigorous sociological and theological analysis* to determine their effectiveness as instruments of the Church. We should not hesitate to make the most exacting sociological studies of mission agencies, evangelistic movements, denominational structures, and so forth. History teaches us that many such structures will eventually succumb to institutionalism and become hindrances rather than helps to the Church. The fact that God has raised up a movement is no warranty against eventual infidelity or self-centeredness. Having clearly distinguished such structures from the essence of the Church, we can freely ask to what extent these forms are actually functional.

## PART FOUR: SIX PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD EVANGELISTIC RENEWAL

a. *Undertake a study of the biblical nature of the Church*. Many local churches could be revolutionized through a year-long study of the Church. Preaching and teaching could be coordinated with small-group Bible studies in which the Church is the main topic. The focus would be on such books as Acts, I Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, with adequate attention also being given to the Old Testament development of God's plan (particularly the concepts of the Covenant and the People of God). The reading of significant books on the Church should be a part of this process. In English, such popularly-written books as *Fire in Coventry*, *A New Face for the Church*, *Full Circle*, *Body Life*, *The Congregation in Mission*, and *Brethren, Hang Loose* (representing a wide range of denominational traditions) are particularly helpful<sup>49</sup>.

My own mission in Brazil has benefited immeasurably from a series of sixteen Bible studies on the Church, using a simple study guide which we prepared.

b. *Evaluate the quality of the community life of the church*. Some form of self-study — again using small groups — can be undertaken. The task of evaluation provides the objective focus, while small-group interaction deepens the subjective experience of community. Lawrence Richards in *A New Face for the Church* gives solid guidelines for such evaluation together with examples and illustrations. Here again, reading and Bible study should be mixed in.

c. *Attempt to think through what the Bible teaches about the gifts of the Spirit*. More heat than light radiates from this subject, but the biblical teachings are clear. Both pastoral and small-group emphasis on gifts (the two should go together) would focus on such passages as Romans 12, I Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, I Peter 4, with accompanying study of the related doctrine of the priesthood of believers. The aim would be to create a "gift consciousness" and help each believer identify and use his gift(s). The books *Full Circle* and *Body Life* are especially helpful here, and C. Peter Wagner has excellent material on gifts in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* and *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming*.

d. *Attempt consciously to transcend the clergy/laity dichotomy, both in thought and speech*. As a starter, a pastor might stop using the word "layman" for a period of time and see how this forces him to rethink his understanding of the Church. (Personal experience has shown this to be a rewarding discipline!) Small groups could study the biblical concepts of "ministry" and "people" and begin to build their discoveries into their thought and speech. The goal is to remove any unbiblical dualism here and create the awareness that all believers have some "work of ministry."

e. *Consider the possibility of forming one or more new congregations by the division of the church*. Some churches will never begin to grow until they divide. Churches of several hundred members should seriously consider gathering together several families who live in the same area and using them as the nucleus of a new congregation. This is often more effective than preaching missions, "revival" campaigns, or other intensive short-term efforts, because it creates a second *center of growth* and deepens the involvement of all who participate.

This process of multiplication could be the natural outgrowth of the previous suggestions given above. The new group formed does not immediately sever its connection with the mother church, but begins to carry on its own evangelism and community life through small groups, personal evangelism, and worship services. With sufficient growth, the group will have to move to a large basement or garage or other structure, or rent a school or small hall. By concentrating on people rather than programs or buildings, the group will soon be able to support one or more full-time workers. As normal church growth occurs, further division can take place.

f. *Identify segments of the surrounding population especially open to the Gospel where new churches could be planted*. Going one step beyond the previous suggestion, a local church might actually seek out "receptive populations" within easy reach of the Church and attempt to minister there. In urban centers, particularly, some church members will probably live near specific groups which may be highly receptive to

the Gospel. Such groups might include inner-city or outer-city poor, ethnic or occupational groups, or those institutionalized in hospitals or prisons. Two or three families with the active support of the entire church could initiate an evangelistic ministry with the specific goal of planting a new self-supporting congregation.

With regard to both these last two suggestions, Melvin Hodges' little book *A Guide to Church Planting* provides excellent counsel for the church wishing to begin a church-planting ministry.

### Conclusion

There is no salvation outside the Church unless the Body of Christ be decapitated, separated from the Head. The Church is the body of Christ; the community of the Holy Spirit; the people of God. As such, it is the agent of God's plan for the reconciliation of all things.

It is in the perspective of cosmic reconciliation that we may understand the evangelistic task of the Church. The Church is God's agent of evangelism because evangelism is at the very heart of God's cosmic plan.

If the Church has not been sufficiently recognized as God's agent of evangelism, it is because it has too generally been confused with its various culturally-bound institutional expressions. The need of the hour is to understand the Church as a Spirit-endowed charismatic organism which is cross-culturally valid, not as an institutional organization molded by the world. Once this distinction is made, the normal growth of the Church can be understood and planned for, and the various parachurch structures, including denominations, can be dealt with and used effectively.

Let us not devalue the Body of Christ! Let us not relegate God's agent of evangelism to a secondary role of simply one means among many. For from the Cross to eternity it remains true that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her . . . that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:25-27).

### FOOTNOTES

1. God's activity in the world is not confined to evangelical redemption; it also includes preservation and judgment. Thus God also acts outside the Church and even in judgment on the Church. But when it comes to redemption, the Church is the only agent God has chosen.

2. Melvin L. Hodges, *A Guide to Church Planting*, 1973, p. 15.

3. The doctrine of the Church has not received sufficient attention in contemporary evangelicalism. This seems to be a general lack among evangelical churches worldwide, but one which is now coming to be recognized.

4. K.L. Schmidt comments that in the attempt "to try to understand the antithesis between an empirical Church and an ideal" in the Post-Apostolic Church, "there arises an awareness of the twofold nature of the Church as the Church militant and the Church triumphant. Such

speculations introduce a distinctive ambiguity into statements concerning the Church. This is equally true of both the Greek and the Latin fathers. The greatest of them, Augustine, whose comprehensive thinking set the Church in the center of Roman Catholic life and thought, is the very one in whom the relation between the empirical and the ideal Church is not made clear. If genuinely Gnostic speculation was held at bay, speculation still established itself in the form of Platonism . . . Protestantism, with its distinction between the invisible and the visible Church, has its own share in this unrealistic Platonism."

Schmidt says further that the Church "as the assembly of God in Christ is not invisible on the one side and visible on the other. The Christian community, which as the individual congregation represents the whole body, is just as visible and corporeal as the individual man . . . If Luther distinguished between the invisible and the visible Church . . . he did so without accepting the Platonism of his successors." Gerhard Kittel, (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. W. Bromiley, 1965, III, 533-534.

5. I recognize there is a problem with the word "institution," for any "established practice, law, or custom" may be considered an institution (*Webster's New Practical Dictionary*). In this sense baptism and the Lord's Supper, for instance, may be thought of as institutions, and it is difficult to make a distinction between "institution" and "church." But I am here using "institution" in the more restricted (and more popular) sense of "an established society or corporation" — in other words, as a formally structured organization, whether this structuring has come about by law, a constituting assembly, or merely accumulated tradition. I am aware that some prefer to use the phrase "institutional church" to describe what I here refer to as "community," but this is not the sense in which I am using the phrase.

6. See Kittel, op. cit.

7. This same cosmic-historical perspective is evident throughout Scripture. All the promises of cosmic restoration in the Old Testament prophets apply here, reaching their climax in Isaiah. In the New Testament the essential message of the Revelation is the uniting of all things under the lordship of Christ. And Isaiah, Peter, and John speak of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17, 66:22; II Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

8. "God's plan is to unite and reconcile all things in Christ so that men can again serve their maker," (Bernard Zylstra, quoted in *Perspective*, Newsletter of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, VII:2, March/April, 1973, p. 14).

9. Eph. 1:10, II Cor. 5:17-21, Rom. 8:21. The Greek word "to unite" or "to gather together" in Ephesians 1:10 comes from the word for "head." The idea of Christ as the head of the Church and of all things (e.g., in Eph. 1:22) naturally suggests the thought of uniting all things under the headship of Christ, and this accounts for Paul's using the rather uncommon word "to unite, to bring under proper headship" in Eph. 1:10. See Kittel, op. cit., pp. 681-682.

<sup>10</sup>. I Cor. 8:6, 15:28; Eph. 1:22, 3:9, 4:10; Col. 1:17-20; cf. Heb. 1:2-3, 2:8-10.

<sup>11</sup>. Eph. 3:10 — "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." The phrase is ambiguously translated "by the church" in the English KJV, thus masking the force of the fact of the Church as the *agent* of God's plan.

<sup>12</sup>. Historically the people of God have disagreed not so much over what God is doing as to when he will do it. Most Christians admit that, in one sense or another, God is bringing history to a cosmic climax. But one branch has said, "Not now; then!" And, in reaction, another group has said, "Not then; now!" Those who postpone any real presence of the Kingdom until after Christ's return ("Not now; then") do not expect any substantial renewal now except in the realm of individual human experience — not in politics, art, education, culture in general, and not even, really, in the Church. On the other side are those who so emphasize present renewal in society in general that both personal conversion and the space-time future return of Christ are denied or overshadowed, and man's deep sinfulness is not taken seriously. Hopefully, Christians today throughout the world are coming to see that the Kingdom of God is neither entirely present nor entirely future. The Kingdom of God (the uniting of all things in Jesus Christ) is now here, is coming, and will come. Francis Schaeffer well expresses this balanced view when he speaks of a "substantial healing" now in all the areas of sin-caused alienation. What God promises is a substantial healing now and a total healing after Christ's return. F. A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1968, p. 152; *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 1970, pp. 66-69.

<sup>13</sup>. C. H. Pinnock, "The New Pentecostalism: Reflections by a Well-Wisher," *Christianity Today*, XXVII:24 (September 14, 1973), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>. I Pet. 4:10; cf. Eph. 3:10. In the Greek the word "manifold" (*poikilos*) often has the sense of "many-colored," in the sense of the variety of colors in flowers or clothing. W.R. Nicoll (ed.), *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1961, III, p. 309.

<sup>15</sup>. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, 1970, pp. 143, 139.

<sup>16</sup> Toffler (citing Max Weber) reminds us that bureaucracy, as an organizational form, appeared with the rise of industrialism, and suggests that it is passing away as many societies move into a post-industrial phase (p. 126). If this is true, it may be highly significant for denominational and other ecclesiastical organizations.

<sup>17</sup>. Hans Küng similarly defines the Church as "the People of God . . . the community of the faithful"; the Church is "the community of the new people of God called out and called together" *Structures of the Church*, tr. Salvator Attanasio, 1964, pp. X, 11.

<sup>18</sup>. Technically, the Latin *laicus* comes from the Greek *laikos*, "pertaining to the people," which in turn derives from *laos*. Whereas *laos* occurs frequently in the New Testament, *laikos* is not found at all.

<sup>19</sup>. C. P. Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, 1971, pp. 124-134. Cf. Donald McGavran, (ed.), *Eye of the Storm*, 1972, pp. 205-218.

<sup>20</sup>. Some will perhaps say that anything which goes beyond producing conversions is no longer evangelism but becomes follow-up or nurture. The point is, however, that the evangelistic task is not really complete until it becomes self-perpetuating. Wagner comments, "Some regard follow-up as a separate step which comes after evangelism itself, but this is a fallacy all too common in evangelistic strategy." "Jesus did not separate follow up from evangelism. He included them all in the same package of 'making disciples,'" *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*, 1973, pp. 45, 46.

<sup>21</sup>. These are internal factors inherent in the biblical nature of the Church. McGavran and others have rightly pointed out the importance of external factors which determine the receptivity of a people and are conditioned by political, religious, ideological, socio-economic, and other influences. These also need to be taken into consideration, but do not relate directly to the nature of the church itself.

<sup>22</sup>. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 1970, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup>. The optimum size of local congregations will vary according to cultural factors, and no arbitrary limit can be set. Church growth research would seem to suggest, however, that once a congregation has grown to a few hundred members the rate of growth will slow down unless new branch congregations are formed through growth-by-division. Where notable exceptions to this pattern are found, closer examination will usually reveal that the local "congregation" running into the thousands is in reality a whole congeries of smaller "sub-congregations" in which growth-by-division is taking place as the normal pattern.

<sup>24</sup>. W. W. Oetting, *The Church of the Catacombs*, 1964, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup>. Rom 16:2; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2. Cf. G. W. Peters, *Saturation Evangelism*, 1970, pp. 147ff.

<sup>26</sup>. Neil Braun, *Laity Mobilized: Reflections on Church Growth in Japan and Other Lands*, 1971, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>. J. L. Garrett, Jr., (ed.), *The Concept of the Believers' Church*, 1969, p. 259.

<sup>28</sup>. Neither Jesus nor Paul normally evangelized alone. Almost immediately after his baptism, Jesus had disciples around him — an incipient Christian community (John 1:29-42). Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two, not one-by-one. Peter took others with him to Samaria and to Cornelius' house in Caesarea (Acts 8:14, 10:23). Paul was nearly always accompanied by one or more companions. Although there are exceptions to this pattern (Philip in Acts 8:4-8 and 8:26-40, Paul in Athens), they do seem to be exceptions, not the rule. Normally, where the missionaries went, the Church went with them (in the sense of at least one companion), so that the evangelistic call was a call, in part, to an already-existing and demonstrated communal fellowship. This gives new

meaning to Christ's statement about being present in the midst of two or three gathered believers (Matt. 18:20), as well as to the concept of "household evangelism."

<sup>29</sup>. "The New Testament speaks always of the upbuilding of the community. I can edify myself only as I edify the community," Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, tr. G. W. Bromiley, 1958, IV, 2, p. 627.

<sup>30</sup>. One of the important functions of community life is the maintenance of discipline. Here community and doctrine come together and "orthodoxy of belief" is joined to "orthodoxy of community" (to use Francis Schaeffer's terms).

<sup>31</sup>. Cf. H. A. Snyder, "Misunderstanding Spiritual Gifts," *Christianity Today*, XVIII:1 (October 12, 1973), pp. 15-18.

<sup>32</sup>. The most important passages on gifts in Paul's writings are, of course, Rom. 12:6-8, I Cor. 12:8-10, I Cor. 12:28, and Eph. 4:11. In these passages we find four different listings of the gifts of the Spirit. While the lists are essentially similar, it appears that Paul had something different in mind, in terms of the functions of these gifts, in I Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11 than he did in Rom. 12:6-8 and I Cor. 12:8-10. In the latter two passages the emphasis is on the fact of the gifts themselves; of the diversity within the unity in the body of Christ. This is seen in the fact that Paul here speaks of prophecy, teaching, healing, etc., rather than of prophets, teachers, healers, etc. In the former two passages the emphasis is on the gifts as they relate to the functioning of the Church.

<sup>33</sup>. The flexibility and fluidity of New Testament terminology is important to bear in mind. In general, "pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11) are probably synonymous with the deacons and elders Paul elsewhere speaks of, and which he himself appointed in the churches he founded. Paul specifically mentions on one occasion "elders . . . who labor in preaching and teaching" (I Tim. 5:17). Likewise "bishops" seem to designate those with the general oversight of more than one congregation within a city; they can be considered as exercising the gifts of pastor, teacher, and perhaps apostle.

This same terminological fluidity appears in the *Didache* (c. A.D. 120), where "apostle" and "prophet" are used almost interchangeably and "bishops and deacons" are associated with the prophetic and teaching ministry.

<sup>34</sup>. For evidence that the term "apostle" was used in the early church for more than the original Twelve, see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. 167.

<sup>35</sup>. In this connection, C. P. Wagner has suggested the possibility of a specific "missionary gift" bestowed by the Holy Spirit to enable certain people to exercise other gifts they may possess in a cross-cultural situation. Although the New Testament does not mention such a gift, there is no reason on this account to rule it out. Legitimate gifts of the Spirit may be many and varied, and no biblical list appears to be complete. Further, those whom God calls to serve in a particular way he also

capacitates for this service. The value of Wagner's suggestion is that it emphasizes that missionary ministry is charismatically determined; that effective cross-cultural communication depends upon the exercise of spiritual gifts. While one cannot dogmatically affirm the existence of a missionary gift, the elasticity of the New Testament conception of spiritual gifts permits this possibility, and the concept is pragmatically useful. (*Frontiers in Missionary Strategy*, p. 79).

<sup>36</sup>. Neither of these cultures was homogeneous; both contained identifiable subcultures, as the New Testament itself reveals.

<sup>37</sup>. Francis Schaeffer suggests eight biblical norms for church structure in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 1970, pp. 59-67. Although these suggestions go somewhat beyond what I have presented here and put less emphasis on spiritual gifts, they are not in conflict with the position of this paper.

<sup>38</sup>. This is the traditional Roman Catholic view, but many Protestant groups also tend in this direction.

<sup>39</sup>. It seems to me that we have no biblical authority for arguing that the charismatic leadership gifts ceased after the New Testament period. Such gifts have often existed throughout church history, but have not always been recognized as such.

<sup>40</sup>. That the functions of deacon, elder, and bishop were associated with spiritual gifts is suggested by such passages as Acts 20:28, 21:8; I Tim. 4:14; I Pet. 5:1; II John 1.

<sup>41</sup>. The ministry of the first deacons (Acts 8) and of Paul and Barnabas as missionary apostles (Acts 13:1-3) was recognized formally by the Church; the evangelistic ministry of Philip and the apostolic ministry of Apollos seem to have become recognized informally as a result of their effectiveness.

<sup>42</sup>. Peters, *Saturation Evangelism*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup>. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, pp. 194-222 and passim.

<sup>44</sup>. G. W. Webber discusses the importance of these two foci in *The Congregation in Mission*, 1964, pp. 121-131, and *God's Colony in Man's World*, 1960, pp. 58-59.

<sup>45</sup>. Robert Coleman emphasizes the importance of Christ's life together with his disciples in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 1964. According to Coleman, Jesus "spent more time with his disciples than with everybody else in the world put together" (p. 43). This is strong support for the priority of community and the importance of structures which nourish community.

<sup>46</sup>. "The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit," *Christianity Today*, XV:3 (November 6, 1970), pp. 4-7; "The People of God — Implications for Church Structure," *Christianity Today*, XVII:2 (October 27, 1972), pp. 6-11.

<sup>47</sup>. The years immediately preceding the Reformation witnessed a proliferation of small home Bible study groups (W. S. Reid, "The Grass-Roots Reformation," *Christianity Today*, XV:2, October 23, 1970, pp. 62-64). The Anabaptist Movement from the start strongly emphasized community life, and this was nourished by in-home worship. The *collegio pietatis* of the Pietist Movement was essentially a small-group structure (Donald Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance*, 1973, p. 118). The Wesleyan Revival in eighteenth-century England was largely sustained by the "class meeting," a carefully structured form of the small group (H. A. Snyder, "Church Renewal Through Small Groups," *United Evangelical Action*, XXX:2 Summer, 1971, pp. 29-31). In the American Holiness Movement of the 1880s and 1890s, literally hundreds of small-group prayer and Bible study meetings sprang up (Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement*, 1971, p. 42). Histories of revivals often emphasize the great amount of prayer that preceded them; is it more than coincidence that such prayer was usually the result of small-group prayer meetings? Church history shows that the modern-day emphasis on small groups is merely a revival of what has always been characteristic of the Church at its best. See also D. M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, 1972, pp. 126-127.

<sup>48</sup>. Dean Kelley in *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* rightly emphasizes that discipline or "strictness" is a characteristic of virtually all significant and society-transforming religious movements. Such discipline is best maintained by the community itself, and this in the context of the small group. Not only is this sociologically valid; it squares with what Jesus and Paul teach (Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5:3-13).

<sup>49</sup>. See bibliography.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

I know of no book which deals specifically with the topic of this paper, and few books on related subjects really reflect the biblical view of the Church. The following books are particularly helpful for recovering the biblical meaning and dynamic of the church.

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