

## On Specialists Without Spirit

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'We live mainly by forms and patterns,' the renowned storyteller Wallace Stegner warns, 'and if the forms are bad, we live badly.'<sup>1</sup> In a prescriptive commentary on today's leadership styles, one might substitute the word 'live for the word 'lead.' Certainly, we are inundated with forms and 'models.' And if this is the case in the general field of leadership, it is also the case in the particular field of ecclesiastical leadership. One may note two research 'currents' that are rarely analyzed together.

The first 'current' entails an increasing corpus of church leadership advice distinctly influenced by Western management philosophy. The Association of American Publishers reports annual growth of 37% in the religious publishing sector, calling it a 'growth business.' Sales are projected in excess of five billion dollars per year. And similar ratios are reflected in the growing body of literature on church leadership.<sup>2</sup> Popular works include, *Jesus CEO*, *The Management Methods of Jesus*, and *The Purpose-Driven Church*.<sup>3</sup>

The second 'current' entails a growing corpus of scholarly research on the present work of the Holy Spirit characterized by a revitalized pneumatology. Indeed, cessationism seems to be fighting a losing battle. And as Philip Jenkins notes, Christianity is spreading fastest among the 'empowered evangelicals.' Jenkins observed that while this movement emerged only at the start of this century, by 2040 it will likely reach one billion followers—far outnumbering the world's Buddhists and roughly equaling the world's Hindus.<sup>4</sup> This increase in 'believers' is matched by a substantial increase in books and literature on the leadership of the Spirit.

So then, we may note two currents: one that emphasizes Western management philosophy and one that emphasizes the leadership of the Spirit. Even a cursory review of these two streams indicates a radical difference in language. The former is a language of *control* while the latter is a language of *dependency*.<sup>5</sup> And while church leaders seem to use both languages, in practice they most often reflect the Western management approach.

As an indication, one needs only to look at the leading title<sup>6</sup> on church leadership, Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church*. With more than one million copies sold and more than

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<sup>1</sup> *When the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (New York: Random House, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Steven F. Hayward, Senior Fellow with the Pacific Research Institute comments, 'Now, leadership studies are in vogue among Christians, and if you take the literature seriously, you would think that Jesus Christ was cut out to be a managing partner at McKinsey and Company.' See 'Christian Leadership Books' Great Cloud of Unknowing' at <http://www.acton.org/publicat/ranl/article.php?id=351>

<sup>3</sup> M. Z. Nelson, 'Religion Sells,' *Christian Century*, Oct 19, 2004. Also see: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1058/is\\_21\\_121/ai\\_n8702435](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_21_121/ai_n8702435). A comprehensive literature review is also available here: C. B. Handy and J. Adair, *Creative Church Leadership* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> A typical (and thought-provoking) example of this dependency is Henry Blackaby's claim, 'The world functions by vision; God's people live by revelation. Vision is something people produce; revelation is something people receive.' H. Blackaby and R. Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001) p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> The full title is *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995). Other titles include: L. B. Jones, *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (Hyperion, 1996); B. Briner, *The Management Methods of Jesus: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Business* (Nelson Business, 2005); K. M. Kouzes, B. Z. Pozner, and C. Maxwell, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge* (John Wiley and Sons, 2004); J. O. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer (Commitment to Spiritual Growth)* rev. ed. (Moody Publishers, 1994); L. D. Solomon, *Evangelical Christian Executives: A New Model for Business Corporations* (Transaction, 2004); H. J. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (Crossroad/Faith and Formation, 1993); A. Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Baker Books, 2003); D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from I Corinthians* (Baker Books, 2004); K. O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision*, rev. ed. (Moody Publishers, 1997); F. S. Wuellner, *Feed My Shepherds: Spiritual Healing and Renewal for Those in Christian Leadership* (Upper Room Books, 1998); E. G. Hinson, *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership*, (Upper Room Books, 1999).

300,000 pastors using its ancillary materials in twenty-two languages, the book is a prime example. It liberally employs such terms as ‘assimilation,’ ‘programming,’ ‘psychographics,’ ‘target markets,’ ‘composite profiles,’ and ‘pastoral management.’<sup>7</sup>

Beneath these terms is a philosophy of ‘successful ministry’ as defined by the twin Western ideals of *celebrity* and *scale*. If the size of the ministry and the popularity of the pastor/priest are the defining metric, then the ambitious leader must master the primary elements of Western management science: vision, strategy, objectives, and goals—all programmed into an infrastructure simulating a contemporary corporate or political organization.<sup>8</sup>

But is this emphasis on ‘the Pastor/Priest as Executive’ really helping?<sup>9</sup> In the past fifteen years, the Western church has spent more than five-hundred billion dollars on ministry. Yet the combined membership of all protestant denominations has decreased 9.5%, while the national population has increased 11.4%.

- In the US each month, 2,700 churches close down.<sup>10</sup>
- In the UK between 1980 and 2000, the Church of England has suffered a 27% decline.<sup>11</sup> Since 1987, attendance at Anglican churches by youth between the ages of 14 and 17 has decreased by 34.9%. And ‘If the same rate continues to apply, there may be no young people at all in the church in twenty years’ time.’<sup>12</sup>

And even more telling is chronic, pervasive *deformation professionnelle* among the leaders of the church, where there is an epidemic of ‘burnout’ and disillusionment. According to a recent survey:<sup>13</sup>

- Seventy percent of the clergy constantly fight depression.
- 1,500 leave the ministry each month due to ‘moral failure,’ spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.<sup>14</sup>
- Fifty percent are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but confess that they have no other way of making a living.
- Ninety percent admit their ministry is completely different from what they thought it would be.
- Ninety percent state that their seminary or Bible school training did only a fair to poor job preparing them for ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> The Church of England University College recently partnered with a regional business school to develop an MBA program on church leadership. The project failed after just two years. ‘The External Examination Report’ for 2002 sought to identify the program’s weaknesses. It is instructive to note the technocratic nature of its criticisms; i.e., deficiencies in research methodology, ‘for example, on ethnography.’

<sup>9</sup> A nationwide survey in the UK examined the causes of declining church attendance in a four-part non-denominational questionnaire. Fourteen thousand people responded. The results were released in 2005. The number one problem was identified as a lack of ‘believing and caring shepherds.’ See: <http://www.churchsurvey.co.uk/>. Also, see: [http://www.afajournal.org/2005/july/705Christ\\_UK.asp](http://www.afajournal.org/2005/july/705Christ_UK.asp)

<sup>10</sup> D. Henderson, *Fresh Encounters: Experiencing Transformation Through United Worship-Based Prayer* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress Publishing Group, 2004). Also, see: <http://www.pastorsconnection.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=29>

<sup>11</sup> M. Furlong, *C of E: The State It's In* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 2002), p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> M. Furlong, p. 210.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Southeastern Free Will Baptists College. Statistics drawn from multiple denominational publications, including *Campus Crusade*, *Pastor to Pastor*, *Focus on the Family*, *Ministries Today*, and *Charisma Magazine*. See also: <http://www.sfwbc.edu/alumni/modules/news/article.php?storyid=11> and H. B. London and N. B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risks* (Ventura, California: Gospel Light/Regal Books, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Sunscape Ministries of Colorado, which serves clergy in crises, reported that in all denominations nationwide (USA), 1,600 ministers per month are terminated or forced to resign their pulpit. E. Tiansay, ‘Hundreds of Pastors Leave Their Ministry Each Month’ (Internet: John Mark Ministries). <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/8084.htm> n.d.

Clearly, we are at crosscurrents.<sup>15</sup> Eugene Peterson argues that church Leaders have ‘adopted the language of the market and of the entrepreneur (depersonalizing “souls” into consumers or causes),’ allowing their ‘pastoral vocation to serve the criteria of success as defined by the American culture.’<sup>16</sup> One is reminded of Max Weber’s warning that his sophisticated theories of management could result in ‘mechanized petrification,’ to ‘specialists without spirit,’ and to ‘voluptuaries without heart.’<sup>17</sup> To reprise Stegner: ‘[I]f the forms are bad, we live [lead] badly.’ It seems an appropriate time to question the ‘forms’ that are shaping our ecclesiastical leadership philosophy.

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Nouwen reflects, ‘I think we are only half aware of how secular even theological schools have become. Formation in the mind of Christ, who did not cling to power but emptied himself . . . is not what most seminaries are about. Everything in our competitive and ambitious world militates against it.’ H. J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: The Crossword Publishing Company, 1989) p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Eerdmans.com, ‘Interview with Eugene H. Peterson, author of *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (February 2005). <http://www.eerdmans.com/petersoninterview.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Brooks Faulkner observes that national research from the 1980s and 1990s revealed that the leading cause of pastor fallout was ‘the control and power factor.’ ‘Who’s in charge was one that kept surfacing,’ said Faulkner, who has thirty-five years’ experience counseling embittered pastors. E. Tiansay, ‘Hundreds of Pastors Leave Their Ministry Each Month,’ John Mark Ministries at <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/8084.htm>.