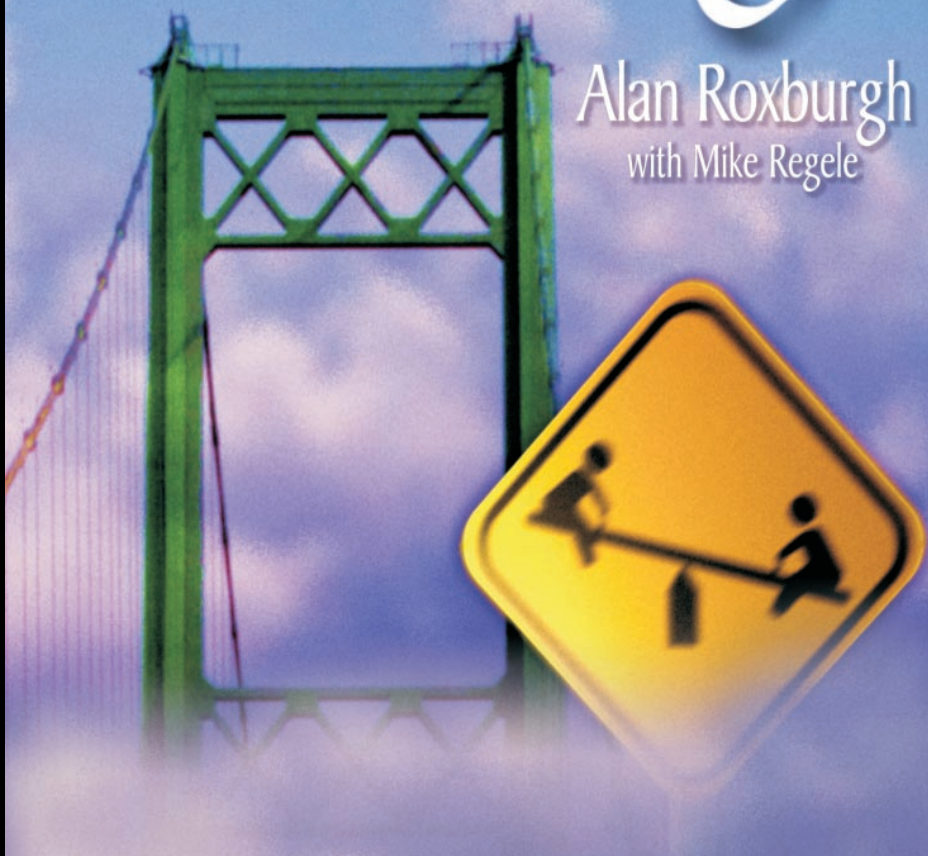


Crossing The Bridge

Alan Roxburgh
with Mike Regele



Church Leadership in a Time of Change

Crossing The Bridge **Church Leadership In A Time Of Change**

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Welcome to the In-Between World

LEADERS, TODAY, ARE AWARE that the world they grew up in is changing rapidly, indeed, some would even say, a known world is passing away. How and why is this the case? Understanding these questions is much more complex than asking the obvious. All of us could make lists describing those things that have disappeared in the last fifty years and the new ways of living that have taken their place. The following story provides us with a simple, yet profound illustration.

One day, I was sitting at my desk, at home, writing. Beside me a window opens out across the lawn onto my North Vancouver neighborhood. The community is somewhat idyllic. All through the summer there are more tourists, than residents, as people travel from all over the world to climb the mountains I can see from my window. Bus loads of people come to walk across the suspension bridge that crosses a deep gorge in the Capilano River where salmon run in the spring. The neighborhood has a variety of houses, peopled by those who have finally made it to the North Shore. But I also recognize that in the busyness of all our lives I hardly know any of my neighbors even after almost five years of living in one of the best neighborhoods. In fact, if the truth be known, with our cars, telephones and rushed lives, I don't think anyone imagines that we need to get to know one another. What is a neighborhood anymore? It is certainly not the place I see out of my office window. So much has changed over the years. The utopian suburbs we built following the end of World War II have become little more than habitats for our isolated, harried lives. We may dream of conversations across the garden fence with some wise Mr. Wilson in a Home Improvement world, but it's really not there for most of us. Other things have come between the dream and the reality.

Another evening shortly after the above reflection, my wife and I invited an assorted group of people from our church over for an evening. While most had come from somewhere else in the country within the previous 10-year period, some were long term residents of the North Shore. One of these was a retired university professor whose avocation was geography. He brought with him a photograph of my street—the same one I can see from my window. The photograph showed the street almost fifty years ago. It was a narrow, dirt track in the bush with a single house sitting on one side. As I looked at that picture and thought about my neighborhood today, I was aware of the depth of change that has been sweeping over us since the middle of this century. It has been immense.

One evening, Mike was meeting with a church about its future and he was also reflecting on the amount of change from quite another perspective.

I could not help wondering to myself if there would be a future for this church. Forty years ago, the community was a bustling suburb of Los Angeles. Young families filled the post-war houses that were being built on every block. But as I walked into the church, I noticed the bars on all of the windows. I noticed that the average age of the church was 65 and the average attendance, once a robust 500, was now 50. The neighborhood still had many young families, but they were not of the same racial/ethnic group as that of the congregation—and few were crossing the street to enter the church. Once a growing and exciting church had now become a mere shadow of its former glory. Much had changed in 40 short years.

Several years ago, the former principal of a seminary was asked to return and speak to the graduating student body. He was a tall, distinguished gentleman in every sense of that word. His career had been characterized by a series of successful pastorates and culminated in the role of principal. As he spoke to the graduates that evening, his voice had a troubled, anxious edge. His ministry had been shaped during the 50's and 60's. The summation of that ministry was caught, for him, in one defining story that continued to have a great impact on his life. In the late 50's, he was the pastor of an eminent old First Church in a mid-size city. He described the visitation he did with people throughout the city, the clubs to which he belonged, and the central role he played in that city's life. He talked of how he was known and

respected by people from all levels of the city's social strata. He was not boasting about himself; on the contrary, he was describing a role that had given him great fulfillment and a wonderful identity.

One night, the fire chief called the pastor out of bed. The downtown of the city was on fire. It burned all through the night and into the morning. The devastation was enormous. What this retired seminary principal wanted to communicate to the students was that he, a pastor, was called and had an important role to play in the midst of the city's tragedy. Here, he was telling the students, was the role of pastor in the community, and they should never let go of that model. With great and passionate eloquence, he was describing the world of parish pastor that must have given incredible comfort, strength and identity, not only to himself, but also to the people of his congregation and the city in which he served. What he sought to do that graduation night was instill this image back into the lives of young seminarians because this man suspected that the familiar and much loved paradigm had died. He longed to see his dream of leadership, shaped by a pre-sixties world, return as the primary model for ministry. He believed passionately that if it could only become reality again, many of the church's problems would go away. Most listening to this man were aware that the world he described had disappeared and would never return.

Change continues in all aspects of society. As a school board member in his local community, Mike remembers vividly the night they had their first student expulsion. The school district formed on the Irvine Ranch in 1972 had gone twenty years without ever having a single student expelled. That night in 1992 was only the beginning, and now in this highly acclaimed district, they regularly expel 25 to 30 students a year. He also remembers the first time there was a shooting incident during a lunch break. Irvine, one of the safest cities in America, was not so safe after all.

Regardless of where one sits, much has changed. We, as leaders, also have a strong sense of how much we have lost in all the change. That is what we want to talk about in this book. Not just the change—it's here and it's real—but the experience of loss and confusion that resides in many of us as we try coming to terms with all that is happening. We can't hold on to the past. We know that traditional structures disappear; however, these disappearances have cost dearly. We have responses in ourselves to which we must attend, if we want to appropriately encounter the new world that is bearing us into rapidly changing times.

In a very real sense, many are grieving the death of much of what we have known, and yet, must live into this new reality. This experience is common throughout our society today. The church in North America is going through its own death (Regele 1995). Leaders of congregations or denominations are in the midst of massive destabilizing change. We have to address, in ourselves and with our people, these inner responses to massive changes. How do we learn to lead people through the transitions we are all experiencing when the photographs in our hearts no longer correlate with the images of the world we are in today?

This book is about leading congregations or denominations through a period of tumultuous transition. Understanding is a crucial element in this process. Without the appropriate frameworks that help us interpret our experience personally and within our church systems, we may become disoriented and reactive in our leadership. Indeed, many will revert to what we have known—the tried and true—for resources in coping with what we do not know. Unfortunately, if what we have known does not work in the unknown, our responses prove ineffective, if not actually harmful. The information about change provided in this book is designed to assist you in the particular church leadership context in which you find yourself.

We recommend you seek out fellow leaders with whom to read and discuss this book. Such groups may help you wrestle with particular challenges and change; and with colleagues, you may discuss and develop effective strategies to process change.

Leading in a Changing World

THE ABOVE COMMENTS about change merely state what some are experiencing and others are recognizing in a vague, intuitive manner. Consider the examples and comments below as a means of illustrating how pervasive and fundamental the forces of change are in society today. Such comments beg for reflection and discussion.

COMMENT I

Business consultants, Jim Taylor & Watts Wacker, tell us that in the near future we will experience “change so rapid and so massive that by the century’s end it will have swept away nearly all the underpinnings of modern life” (Taylor, Wacker 1997, xiii).

COMMENT 2

Charles Handy describes the following characteristics of our changing times:

- 42% of all workers feel ‘used up’ by the end of the day.
- 69% would like to live a more relaxed life.
- Parents spend 40% less time with their children than they did thirty years ago.
- The rise in per capita consumption in the last twenty years is 45%, but the decrease in the quality of life as measured by the Index of Social Health is 51%.
- Only 21% of the young now think that they have a very good chance of achieving The Good Life, compared with 41% twenty years ago (Handy 1997, 28).

COMMENT 3

Peter Drucker, one of the most distinguished thinkers of the 20th Century, declares that we have already entered the next century in terms of the depth and breadth of change happening in the world.

(...) the next century is already here, indeed that we are well advanced into it. We do not know the answers. But we do know the issues (ix). Some time between 1965 and 1973 we passed over such a divide and entered the next century. We passed out of the creeds, commitments, and alignments that had shaped politics for a century or two. We are in political terra incognita with few familiar landmarks to guide us (Drucker 1989, 3-4).

COMMENT 4

A church resource group, Leadership Network, sends faxes and mail-outs to your office weekly. Their communications consistently underline their mandate of accelerating and developing strategies for change in the church. As one of the pithy, faxed statements declared: “When the old horse is dead, it’s time to get on a new one!”

COMMENT 5

CNN surveyed some of the most stressful jobs in America today. Some of these jobs were of no surprise. Air Traffic Controllers continued to be at the top of the list. What was a surprise for many was the fact that church leadership has, over the past 25 years, shifted from being among the least, to becoming among the most stressful jobs in America. Neither life nor

leadership in the church is a simple matter anymore. This is a new world. It's not like the Wild West where the great hero jumps off one faithful, but tired, horse and immediately onto a fresh, new model on his way to conquering the frontier. We are certainly living on a new frontier; but this kind of new-and-next thinking, while it might sell books, is a very dangerous and unwise strategy for leading a congregation through the great transition that is ahead of us.

Responding to the Effects of Change

IN EACH OF THE EXAMPLES given above, the effects of the changes transforming North America are highlighted. A world that we have come to know as a good friend is, indeed, passing away; some kind of new world is being born. This change is described as a shift from a modern to a postmodern world—from a functional Christendom that reigned at the center of the culture, to a time in which it is one option among many at the periphery of culture. (For more discussion on this shift, refer to *The Missional Church and Death of the Church*).

It is one thing to understand the content and contours of these changes. It is quite another to know how to respond. The first important thing is to voice the questions. While not comprehensive, the following are ones that leaders must address in order to develop effective responses.

- How do we lead congregations and denominations through this transition?
- What resources will we need?
- How do we engage the responses of people in our congregations when we talk about the need for change?
- How do we, as leaders, process our own responses? We find ourselves in a place we never expected to be when we signed on for ministry.

Picturing Responses to Change

LOOK AT THE ILLUSTRATION on the following page of children playing on a teeter-totter. It's a little unusual because it has a number of children playing on it at the same time, and several standing by looking on.



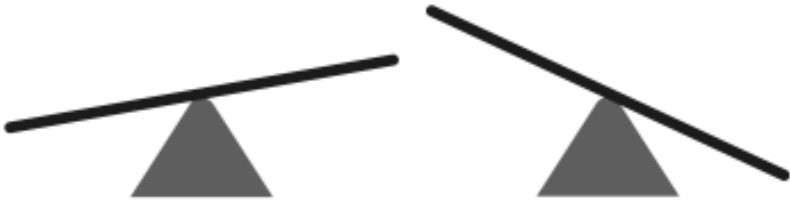
Here are four possible ways of interacting with this picture:

1. You may be the adventurous leader, standing in the center, turning the whole piece in one direction after another.
2. Being even more adventurous, you run up one side and balance precariously as the whole mechanism shifts down the other side, and then you run in the opposite direction to repeat the process.
3. You are one of those kids who just hang-on-tight for the ride, enjoying the swaying back and forth.
4. You stand on the side, watching—glad you are on terra firma.

Where might you be in relation to this picture?

Childhood is one thing. It's play! Adulthood is quite another. Leading any group through major, culture-wide change is yet another. Now it's for real. It has to do with your life, your identity, your dreams of what leadership would be like, your inner sense of value as a person in the midst of massive, conflicting demands. This is where change becomes a very personal—as well as cultural—reality.

Look at a very similar picture to the teeter-totter. It's a fulcrum.



How does a fulcrum work? Everything hinges on the point of the fulcrum. From this point, the whole weight of direction will shift and change. This is an image that helps us see what is happening in our congregations, denominations, world, and ourselves. We are in the midst of pervasive and profound change in Western culture. Consequently, we are that generation of leaders who find ourselves right at one of those fulcrum points of history where everything is tipping over into a very different world. We did not ask to be leaders at this time. We just are. It is what we will do with this fact that will shape not only our own leadership but, even more, the shape of the church and its mission for years to come.

The Shift of the Fulcrum

IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE where we are and how we respond as leaders to all this sweeping change. This is new turf. No one alive today has been here before. We are all in a new place; we are pioneers. We are on the way from a world in which we were trained to lead and have had a great deal of comfort in leading, to a world we do not, as yet, recognize. Given our own responses to the changes, how do we lead in this new time and place? Take another close look at the teeter-totter.

Sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old, inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh, new world began (...) Church, home, and state (had) formed a national consortium that worked together to instill 'Christian values' (...) A few years ago, the two of us awoke and realized that, whether or not our parents were justified in believing this about the world and the Christian faith, nobody believed it today. At least, almost nobody (Hauerwas & Willimon 1990, 15-16).

This is where we find ourselves. What we have known, what we have grown up with, is the known world. Yet, many of us are beginning to understand that that world is passing and that we need to imagine our churches from the perspective of their missional future. It is not simply a matter of moving from one to the other. We are so deeply embedded in the known world that we must first engage ourselves with the in-between, transitional world, before we begin to imagine the shape of our missional future. **One assumption that this book makes is that God is calling us to become a missionary people to our own culture.** We have been cast into this place of transition, like it or not. The reality is that leaders of congregations and denominations, without choice or preparation, have been pushed into this new, in-between place. The teeter-totter illustrates some of the ways leaders are handling this situation.



Leaders and the Fulcrum

SOME ARE STRADDLING BOTH SIDES, both worlds. Like the young child standing on top of the teeter-totter, some try to balance both sides so that it falls neither one way nor the other. On one side is the world they have known. Our instincts are to be loyal to this world. This has been our comfort zone. The values, frameworks and habits of this world have shaped our minds and formed our skills. Standing in the center, feeling the pressures shifting the fulcrum, it is natural to ask this question. Surely we don't have to jettison everything, do we? Aren't there some things about that old world

worth holding onto, no matter what?

Other leaders are simply confused by all the change. They either don't understand it or feel it is too much for them to address. These leaders hang onto old patterns in the hope they will work for them at least a little bit longer.

Other leaders are stimulated by the new-and-the-next. They have no patience with anything over two years old and believe that the future of the church is forever the new thing that is being talked about or the latest trend. These are the change-surfers taking their congregations where none have dared to go before.

Finally, there are those leaders who are so confused by all the change with its attendant stresses and conflicts that they have abrogated their leadership. They have basically given up. They are going through the motions of leadership, but, in reality, they are standing on the sidelines watching from the outside.

Most leaders are a combination of these characteristics and responses. Multiple conflicting responses happen inside us as we try to lead. The emerging new context has appeal. We feel intuitively that we are moving into a changed world. Something deep down tells us that we need to adapt. We also feel the fear of moving the balance either back to where we have been, or forward—down the other side. Within congregations and denominations are conflicting pressures from all sides to act. Some leaders look at the fulcrum and are frustrated with all the changes. They are tired of having to deal with change at every level of their lives. They want to find a still point where nothing shifts or moves. Therefore, they stand firmly in the middle doing their best to keep the teeter-totter still. Huge energy is expended doing this and it cannot be sustained. But the devil one knows may be better than another one doesn't know.

Change and transitions have become pervasive in our lives at the end of the 20th Century. Many church leaders can identify with the person standing in the middle of the teeter-totter. We sense that the world of church life and leadership for which we were trained is passing away. We experience the struggle and resistance of people in our congregations to changes. We have glimpses of what might be emerging on the other side but it's all fuzzy and unclear. When we preach or teach about where the church finds itself or where it might be going, people respond by asking: "What does he want from us? We're already overworked and over-stressed. We're trying our best and he seems to be asking for something

else, but we can't figure it out." The words describing these changes didn't exist when we were in seminary. We know intuitively that our skill-sets are not in tune with what is rolling over us. We are standing atop the congregational teeter-totter trying to keep everything balanced, knowing it won't be long before the balancing act breaks down. The fulcrum is shifting in an entirely new direction. What we are experiencing as leaders in the church is what everyone is experiencing in our culture. The underpinnings of modern life, life as we have known it, are being swept away. Balancing in some imaginary middle will not work for long and we don't feel very secure about what is happening.

We don't need to look too far outside our own congregations to know how pervasive the struggle with transition is for the people we are called to lead. One recent Sunday morning I took people through a brief exercise in the middle of the sermon where I asked them to imagine a situation. At the end of that sermon I had people lined up to tell me that I was describing their lives. Here's the exercise. I asked people to close their eyes and imagine the following scenario. See if you can recognize individuals within your congregation, and echoes within your own experience.

It's 3 a.m. in the morning: *I am unable to sleep. All the anxieties of the day that I can keep at bay while awake, come to haunt me at night. I am a husband or wife and I'm wide-awake, staring out into the darkness as all the worries about work crowd in. The downsizing has been going on now for five years. Each round of cuts they say will be the last, but they keep coming. So far I've managed to stay ahead of the pack. But it's started all over again. Will I be next? They say it's because of globalization and de-regulation. We're in a new world, I'm told, and we all have to change. I need to dodge and adjust. The skills I learned five years ago aren't working today and it's getting hard to keep pace. My dad was ready to retire at 65—they had a great big party for him at the office. He'd been there for 35 years, he knew everyone—still drops in once in a while and they love to stop and catch up. I'll be lucky if I stay in this place for five years and I'll be forgotten six months after I'm gone. I sure feel alone and vulnerable anymore. Yes, I'm dealing with change, alright.*

It's now 3:15 a.m. *The house! Taxes are due. Another big bill waiting to be paid. It's a comfortable place, tastefully decorated, nice furniture, big TV and lots of lawn—and a mortgage that attacks the paycheck like piranha at feeding time. Payments will stretch to retirement. What really gets me down is that the house next door just sold for \$50,000 less than I bought this one for one year ago.*

3:20 a.m. *The job again. Job offers, or lack thereof, race through my half-wake imagination. What's my market value? Is it going up or down? Do I dare find out by putting out resumes or should I stay with the uncertainty I know rather than leap into the uncertainty I don't know? So this is what it comes to in the stark, dark reality of the night when I'm on my own: either I have good market value as a worker or I'm stuck. Either way—cut all the coffee talk at the coffee shop with the guys—without the job I'm a shadow; I have no reality. It's kind of hard to swallow.*

3:25 a.m. *Why is it that all the responses to the sense of unease inside get answered in terms of money: better salary; get a financial planner; invest for the future—these are the answers I get to all the problems. As sensible as these things might be—why is this the only real paradigm we are given to live by?*

3.30 a.m. *The kids. It was impossible to avoid this one in the middle of the night. Why is it so hard for them to make attachments like we used to? I was married with kids of my own at Jim's age and he still can't get any further than casual girl friends. Commit? Settle down? Get a career? I may as well be speaking another language to my kids. Why doesn't John make a decision about life? Why does Ann dress like that—she knows what her clothing suggests, doesn't she? What happened to the old neighborhood values? Where did the schools go: they used to help, now they just cope with all these kids and there doesn't seem much we can do.*

Finally, at 3:35, *I turn over to the person sleeping beside me—I want to wake her up and talk but ... she has to get up and work*

tomorrow as well. Besides, in all the rush to deal with our separate lives, the moments of intersection have been few and far between. Talk! When did we last do that? Come to think of it—whom do you talk to at the end of the day? Who's there to hear what is really going on inside, the cries in the night that come from deep inside? Who is there to listen?

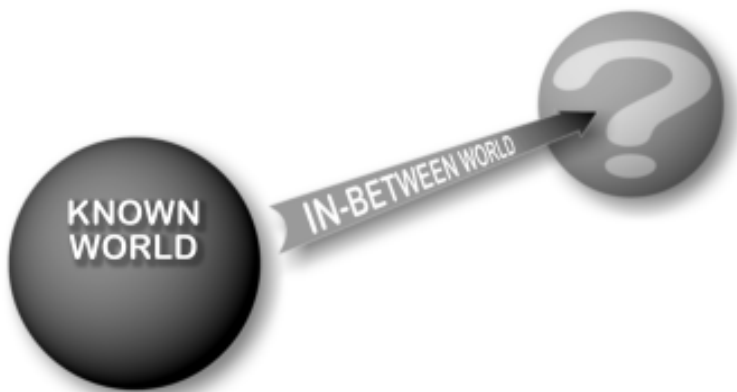
Welcome to the world of change and *transition*.



Developing a Model for Change

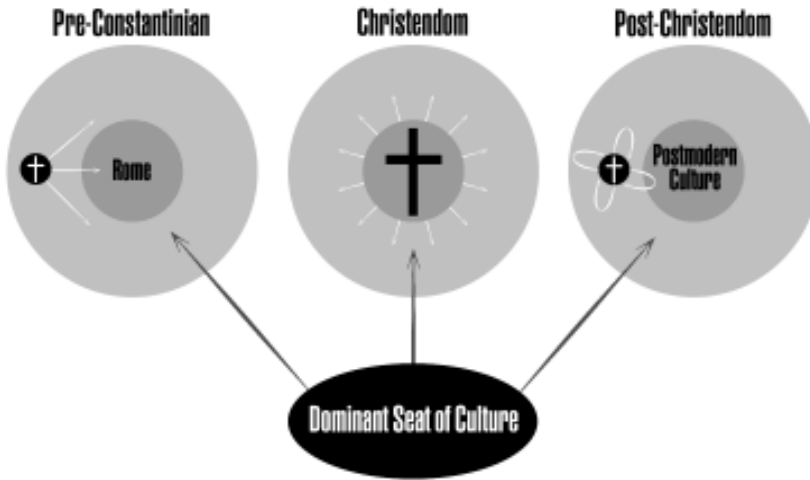
We are in a New Location

HOW DO LEADERS NAVIGATE in this new environment? Familiar skills, behaviors and habits no longer correlate with the new realities. This profound change is being experienced in congregations and denominations; however, these are only particular manifestations of a more pervasive transformation affecting all aspects of our lives. The image of a fulcrum shifting from one side to another is an apt metaphor for Western society. Another metaphor is a tapestry woven from a wide number of diverse strands forming our Christendom world. For quite some time that amazing tapestry has been unraveling, until it now lies threadbare, like tattered threads on the cultural floor. This following diagram shows our new reality, in an in between world.



Not only is pervasive change unfolding in Western culture, but the social location of the church within that culture is also shifting dramatically.

With the legalization of Christianity as the religion of the empire under Constantine, the church moved into that central place where it shared in the social structures of power. This engendered the long period called Christendom. Since the Enlightenment, the Christendom world has been under attack. As we enter a new millenium, the church again finds that it has been pushed to the cultural margins, outside of the social structures of power.



Note that within the first two circles of the illustration, the small arrows point outward from the symbol of the cross. These indicate the church's impact and influence on the surrounding culture. In the Post-Christendom illustration of our current location, the arrows are turning inward. Confused and uncertain, the church today is more likely to be concerned about its own future than its influence; security and survival have priority over missional engagement with our postmodern culture. The church has been pushed to the margins of society—it is now marginalized.

Age of Uncertainty

THE CHURCH'S EXPERIENCE is shifting from a stable and secure world toward a huge, open-ended question. If one word characterizes people's experiences of this, it is uncertainty. During a recent worship service in my church, the woman leading the Prayers of the People prayed for all those in the congregation whose jobs were now in question. Recently,

while driving to an airport with three other people, I was aware that everyone in that car was in the midst of job loss or major vocational change. Few of us, as Boomers, expected this to be part of our lives at the end of the millennium in North America. The uncertainty of change has become the tenor of the times in which we live.

In Mike's book, *Death of the Church*, he discussed the faces that uncertainty takes for most North American people.

Questions of Uncertainty	Faces of Uncertainty
What is true and what is not? Can I possibly know?	Uncertainty of Knowledge
Will there be a place for me? Or will I be replaced or displaced?	Uncertainty of Place
What is happening to my neighborhood?	Uncertainty of Community
What is happening to the family?	Uncertainty of Family
What is right and wrong?	Uncertainty of Morality
With so much changing, can I trust the basic tenets of my faith?	Uncertainty of Faith
If who I am depends upon what has been, will I become lost in what is coming?	Uncertainty of Identity

“Many companies are struggling through transition. Even organizations that see themselves as successful...have spent too much energy on the struggle...organizations are living on whatever energy their downsized and emotional and physically exhausted employee population can muster. This energy depletion is a critical issue. How long can we keep running to catch up, to keep up, get ahead and stay ahead?” (Bendaly 1996, 5).

At all levels, and across a spectrum of roles, leaders find themselves in this strange, new in-between location. What does one call this new location? We have chosen to call it **Transition**.

While we experience current levels of change as disruptive, they can be understood within the framework of a change model that is universal and occurring all the time. It is crucial to grasp this larger change process that will continue to sweep over us for years to come. Indeed, we believe

that at the macro level, all of us will continue to conduct our lives and ministry in this Transition place. Without a basic grasp of its dynamics, leaders will go on feeling out-of-control, driven by a period full of tumultuous change and disorder.

PRESENT FRAMEWORKS NEED NOT BE CHANGED

Without an integrated map that captures what is occurring across the entire change process, individuals and systems go into a **reactive process**. When this happens they seek to protect their roles by resisting change and sometimes, even attempting to recapture the past.

- First, a tremendous amount of energy is given to sustaining the illusion that little of any substance has actually changed within one's own area of responsibility.
- Second, people cast about for solution sets they can bring into their world, or system, without having to address the underlying questions about the foundations and assumptions on which they have been working.

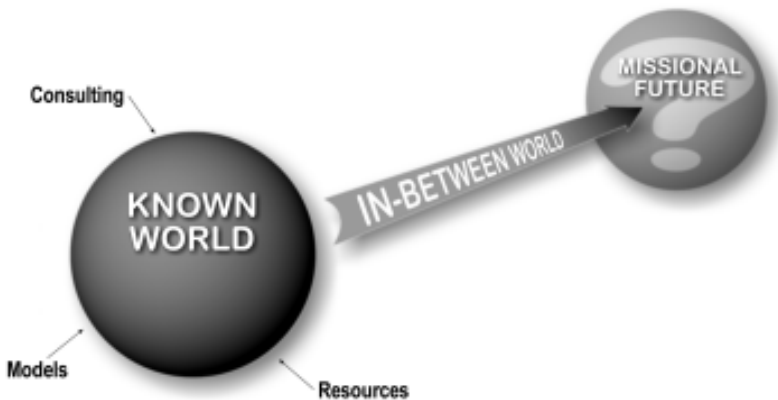
It is possible to work with a wide variety of resource tools from outside sources. These sources can be anything from consulting agencies to programs for the church. Some examples would include the Next and Mega-church models, as well as the recent Natural Church Development movement currently being promoted in North America. Generally, these types of responses to the malaise of church systems are being integrated into long practiced frameworks with little or no actual reflection on the frameworks themselves.

At this point it is necessary to define this word framework. It is a powerful conceptual foundation that allows one to think in disciplined ways. A framework is much like the wooden frame of a house that supports all of the structures within which we live. Once the framework is erected, we never see it unless we engage in fairly major renovation. It is covered with insulation, wall coverings, windows, doors, and all of the elements that make our homes attractive and comfortable. If renovation is necessary, however, we have to go through all the comfortable coverings to those wooden or steel structures that keep our homes stable, safe, and dependable. If you have ever had to do a bathroom renovation, you will understand that superficial decorating will never solve the problems of water damage around a shower stall. The only possible solution is to go inside the walls, back to the studs, and find out the source

of the problem. Painting over the problem is a temporary, quick fix. The damage will reappear unless the root problem is addressed.

Another apt metaphor for the term **framework** is that of a pair of glasses. Traditional glasses have frames and lenses. We never consider the frames unless they require repair. When our prescription lenses are suited to our needs, we never think about the lenses themselves either. With contact lenses, we can forget about them altogether. If we run into problems with our vision, however, we are unable to perceive anything accurately and need help to restore our proper vision. We are a people who require the corrective lenses. At this time in history, we recognize that our lenses and frames need correction; the dominant culture and the turmoil of change in it have distorted our vision. We need God to reshape our eyes, fix our glasses, and give us the eyes to see how we should live as his people in this new wilderness of Transition.

Many of us are expending considerable energy, dollars and time, without facing the more fundamental questions. We would like to redecorate, rather than renovate. We are trying to paint over the water damage, rather than do the more challenging work of going back to the studs. In order to understand these frameworks, we need to return to the initial model describing our present location.



The figure on the far left, a closed circle, represents the known world of assumptions and frameworks that have shaped our understanding of congregations and church systems for a very long time. In one sense this can be described as the Christendom world. It represents the particular

ways church organization and function developed from the Reformation forward. As a result church systems respond to the current crisis in some fairly predictable ways:

- Study resources provided by denominations, or schools, designed to explain and educate.
- Consulting resources from external groups specializing in strategic planning for congregations and denominations have also proliferated during the past 25 years (Percept is an example).
- Programs offered by a variety external resources such as the church leadership events at Willow Creek, or the newer, Natural Church Development.

The essential problem is that all of these offerings continue to be brought into, and integrated into, the known world of church identity and function that has come to an end.

Mike's own presbytery developed a strategic plan to guide congregational development efforts into the new century. After two years of study and reflection, the study team produced a plan fully embracing the emerging missional church model for all existing and future congregations. It is a powerful goal. One pastor quite prophetically spoke a word of caution, however, when he said, "My fear is that we will adopt this language and simply apply it to the same old things we have been doing, which we know are failing." It was a sobering moment, and on the mark!

Another response to confusion and uncertainty is looking for ways to re-introduce control into the systems and our lives. Daryl Conner identifies two ways in which this happens. The first he calls the illusion of continuity. People convince themselves that things remain basically the same even though much, in fact, has altered. The second he calls the illusion of change. Leaders convince themselves that small, insignificant modifications somehow satisfy the requirements for more fundamental change. The point about the small, incremental changes is that they never impact the frameworks out of which the system is operating. This is seeking superficial change while intending to maintain stability. The basic framework of the system remains intact, but a few elements are modified to give the appearance of dramatic change. Conner argues that systems use these two illusions in an attempt to protect themselves from the true implications of change. Again, these are not conscious, intentional

responses to crisis. These are the natural, normal responses to major change. Current denominational systems remain embedded in frameworks that make resources, consulting and programs little more than means of maintaining the integrity of the old frameworks (Conner 1998, 12).

In *Death of the Church*, Mike called this “Predictable Change,” more of the same, only better. While all recognize the need for change, it is change within existing assumptions. It is change that readily submits itself to control by the larger systems that have governed life for years. Unfortunately, this way of thinking about change hamstrings both our church systems and our own leadership, keeping us stuck in a world that is passing.

Bridging the Gap from Known World to Transition World



NOTE THE GAP between the Known World and Transition World. This gap is intended to indicate the need for a fundamental shift in frameworks before a system can effectively engage the in-between world of transition. A bridge must be built between the two worlds. This is the challenge that faces all churches. The bridge is not a one-way street. It is not possible to simply walk across. We will continue to live in a back-and-forth movement for some time. We need to live and lead on the bridge.

We need to rethink denominational and congregational systems and the forms of leadership shaped by these systems. We cannot conceive or reinvent our own denominational realities without addressing the whole denominational world that has developed since the Reformation. This rethinking is essential before we can encounter the rapidly changing realities of the present in ways that move us into a missional future. Hamel and Prahalad summarize the challenge we face in the following way:

- To extend leadership a company must eventually reinvent leadership.
- To reinvent leadership it must ultimately reinvent its industry.
- To reinvent its industry it must ultimately regenerate its strategy (Hamel and Prahalad 1994, 20-21).

Clearly, serious questions must be raised about the models of pastoral leadership and professional ministry that have emerged from the Reformation and continue to shape our present context. With the ending of a functional Christendom and the wholesale shifting of the categories of modernity, new questions about the nature of leadership and the forms of church life emerge. The issues outlined above begin to raise questions about the vision and competencies of leadership for a post-Christian, postmodern context. Such questions will be addressed in the chapters ahead.

Introducing the Phases of Change

THIS IN-BETWEEN WORLD is now our context for leading the church; but it is only part of a larger process of change that has been reshaping North American culture for much of this century. This chapter presents a model for understanding that change process. The model has a number of elements. Each will be presented separately and, then, brought together into a single, comprehensive picture of change. The purpose of this model is to provide a wide-angled picture that frames and explains where we find ourselves.

We will lead through the inevitable changes now transforming North American culture to the extent that we have understood the maps of change now transforming our world.

Someone once said that resistance to change is a sign of sanity! Change is painful, takes a great deal of work and throws one's life into chaos. Who would want to do this on purpose? So, if you are feeling a bit overwhelmed by the inexorable press of change, you are normal, in this

respect. Having said this, however, does not change the bold reality of our situation today. Like it or not, embrace it or not, our world is changing!

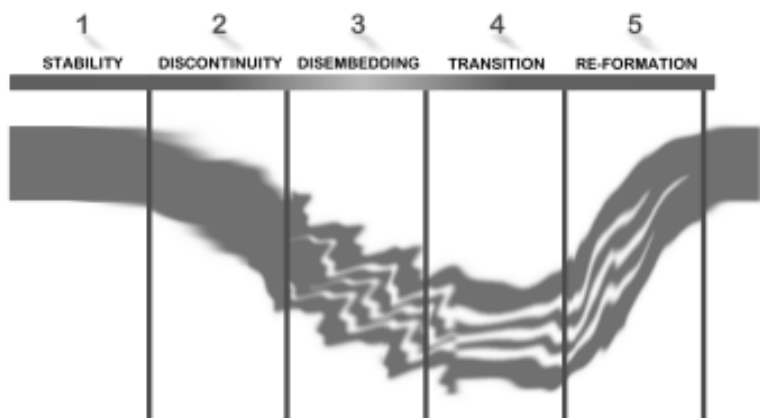
Change is neither simple, nor singular, but a complex process with identifiable stages. The way in which groups or organizations respond to change depends on where they are in their own growth or maturation cycle. One generalization indicates that a young person will usually respond to change with a great deal more flexibility than an adult does in the later years of life. While there are obvious contradictions to the principle, it seems that systems, like people, find change increasingly more difficult to cope with the older they are. If this is the case, then the question of how a system responds to change is a function of the amount of time they have been in operation. The longer the history of an organization, the more deeply embedded its practices, habits and frameworks.



This model of change will help us understand some of this reality. What is change all about? There are steps and processes. This section provides an overview—mental models that help us grasp the dynamics of something that is vastly more complex and dynamic than any static model on paper. We are trying to stop the movie picture and look at the single frames. We all know that our fast-paced reality is far more complicated than this still life.

The Five Phases of Change

THIS MODEL INDICATES FIVE PHASES through which change is continuously moving. These phases may cover only a very brief period of time and be focused on a simple element of change within an organization, or they may represent extremely long periods of change that move through an entire culture. This is a framework about change.



Phase One: Stability

ALL HUMAN SYSTEMS are dedicated to maintaining stability and equilibrium. Everyone's normal response to the world involves the need for control over one's environment. We need understandable maps that help us successfully navigate our lives. Our expectations need to match our perceptions of how the world ought to work. This is what we mean by having frameworks. Change is manageable when it occurs developmentally, or incrementally, within our established frameworks. Significant change creates a crisis within systems and their leaders, when it becomes disconnected from the assumed roles and expectations of the system.

Stability and tradition are the primary characteristics of this phase. In this period, the life of groups and organizations is highly predictable. Routines continually connect with the past. The system, or organization, operates from the basis of an assumed and widely accepted set of practices, values and habits that have remained relatively unchanged over an extended period of time. Established traditions and rituals are taken for granted. They guide people's actions and perceptions of reality, relating current practices to past expectations. The past is honored; its symbols are valued as connections with previous generations. Tradition and ritual give definition to roles and lives. An integral sense of being connected to a past, present and future clearly exists.

One established system is the traditional family. A couple marries and has children. From childbirth to pre-adolescence, stable roles and expectations exist for everyone—parents and children—to function within. Parents will look back on this early period of family as a wonderful time of peace and tranquility, an ideal family life, before the great forces of adolescence are unleashed and the whole system is disembedded from this earlier time.

This time in a family's life might be compared to that long period in Western and North American history when the church had a relatively stable identity and role within the culture. Music is done in a certain way and pastoral roles are well defined and long established. Series of unwritten, but clearly understood, rules and habits guide congregation and denominational life like a magnetic field. These rules and habits are usually not explicit, but they shape the whole life. Normally, specific persons within such systems carry the mantle of "gatekeepers." Their, often self-appointed, role is to keep all systems operating as they "always have." This is a phase when the system functions within a broad layer of stability and is characterized by the power of tradition.

This does not suggest that the system is static. On the contrary, the tradition is being continually re-invented by each generation that assimilates the inheritance of the past. Change is not resisted in this phase because the change occurs within the framework of the tradition. Change does occur, but it does so through a continuous dialogue with the past. This kind of change is predictable. It is more of the same, only better. Because of these characteristics, both the organization and the people within it experience a high level of control over their environment. The world feels like it makes sense and life works. This is largely because the vast majority of people subscribe to the values and traditions of the context. Within this first phase two types of change occur.

Evolutionary Change: Changes are small and incremental at any particular point of time, but over a long period add up to significant change. The system may not recognize particular developments as change because they occur so slowly and gradually that they remain within the assumed core of traditional values. Indeed such change may occur over generations with the appearance of no change. Ironically, this attitude is reflected in such comments as "We have always done it this way!" How far back does this always really go?

After one service at which a Fanny Crosby hymn had been sung, an older member came to the pastor to both thank him for using the hymn

and to point out how important it was to have real, solid hymns in the church rather than all these new choruses. With a wry smile on his face, the pastor thanked the woman. But he also went on to make a point. He said to the older member: “You know, Evelyn, that hymn of Fanny Crosby’s was written over 150 years ago. I can just imagine being in church back then when this young woman got up and introduced these new choruses. People probably turned to each other asking: “What’s wrong with the good-old hymns?” She got the point and walked away with her own smile. In this stability phase, slowly, an innovative piece of music from the outside becomes the sacred sound of the church community. This is evolutionary change. Luther introduced the organ into the church because it was the instrument of choice among university students in the beer halls. Organ sounds were their versions of the electric guitar. Luther wanted to find a way of reaching these students so he brought their instrument into the church and used their music to write hymns. Ever so slowly, bit by bit, the organ shifted from the instrument of the bars to become the instrument of high culture and church culture. All of this was evolutionary.

Developmental Change: Change occurs as improvements are made to already existing systems and practices. In the family illustration, children grow, bed times change, conversation around the table takes on different forms, and children assume new roles, as they grow older. All this is an assumed part of the family process. It is part of a larger framework of what happens in a family.

The phase of stability and continuity can last a very long time. Christendom lasted for one thousand to fourteen hundred years, depending on perspective. Within that long period of relative stability, many values, processes, traditions, roles and norms developed that were normative for Christian life and practice. The shape of congregational life emerged and solidified. The role of pastoral leadership took form and embedded itself deeply in the culture. The power of history is immense in this phase. Little external stress challenges its ways of life and assumptions. Practices and rules that have been in place for a long time frame all of life. Furthermore, they may give a great sense of purpose and meaning.

THE ROLE OF LEADER

Within a system in this phase, the basic style of leadership is management. High value, reward and recognition are placed upon those who understand, represent and augment the traditions, values and symbols. Those who question these values and traditions during this stable

phase are pushed to the edges where they cannot disrupt the equilibrium. This is why, in both the biblical material and our own situation, those with the more prophetic gifts are shifted to the margins. They are deemed threats to stability; their words and pictures are interpreted as undermining the traditions. The system works to nullify the effect of these people as a way of maintaining stability and equilibrium.

The role of pastor was formed and shaped in this stability phase. In other places we speak of the pastor as chaplain. This is a meaningful description. In a stable environment, the role of the pastor is to manage the life of the congregation and care for needs. Likewise, lay leadership within the congregation primarily understands its function as that of sustainer. Their role is to sustain the programs of the church.

Within the stable phase, the primary role of larger denominational systems is the management of life within their systems; hence, denominational leaders. They maintain the ecclesiastical machinery, making sure the appropriate systems are in place to keep a steady stream of pastors flowing out to the congregations, and to collect and allocate mission funds to be sent out into the world. In short, it is a regulatory function. The confusion and stress of congregational and denominational leaders today is that, while they have been trained to fill this stable phase role, the church is no longer in that phase. The implication of this is that church leaders at all levels are running faster and working harder, while finding little results for their efforts. In short, many church leaders are tired and discouraged.

Phase Two: Discontinuity

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STRESSES begin to push against the system's habits and practices. Any parent with children entering the teenage years will understand this period. Children begin to work through their own identity by pushing up against such assumed values as curfews, clothing styles and belief systems. Now begins the stretch of the family system at critical points. Once compliant children challenge established norms with their own discontinuities. The perfectly mannered, warm, loving little girl becomes an aggressive, talk-back, ring in the nose, green-haired, hormonal teenager. Assumed ways of operating within the family now need to be re-evaluated and re-negotiated. Those managing the household rules need to become creative and highly flexible parents or else there will be a full-scale rebellion and rift in the family.

A similar process has been occurring in churches. Since the mid-point

of this century, powerful sub-cultures have been pushing back on many of the accepted, traditional systems of church life. Movements and parachurch organizations emerged in the last half-century and confronted the church's need for change at a variety of levels. It was difficult for post-war church systems to share a place with these upstart challengers from within their own ranks. The return of soldiers from the war, the massive migration out of cities into suburbs, and the economic boom of the 50's and 60's, all made it extremely difficult for most church leaders to see any significant problems with the tradition. The church seemed to be doing well in America. Yet, at the same time, a continual and growing restlessness and the ongoing emergence of groups demanding renewal challenged the fixedness of tradition and stability.

The result was an emerging clash within the church systems not unlike the parental struggle with the teenager. Often, this clash was not resolved in a healthy manner. People increasingly found their spiritual vitality in parachurch organizations, even while they continued to attend local congregations. The latter part of the 60's and into the 70's saw the rapid erosion of confidence in those very traditions that had been the foundation of church life. Increasing numbers of the younger generation began leaving the churches. Many leaders left, turning to related professions such as teaching or counseling. The ranks of parachurch organizations began to swell with young leaders eager to function in an environment that was no longer controlled by tradition. Underlying all of these movements was a consistent sense among people that the churches were failing to shift their systems and ethos quickly enough to engage the massive changes sweeping through American culture.

This kind of stress on churches and their denominational systems continues. A huge amount of flux continues in and out of congregations, as members of every age visit other churches looking for different styles and values to meet their personal desires. They often return to their home churches and begin to push back on the leadership looking for and expecting change. In Toronto, Canada, when the Toronto Airport Blessing was being reported in *Time* magazine and the *Times of London*, as well as being featured on the Donahue daytime television series, many members of churches in Toronto were visiting the Airport and returning to their churches demanding changes. This placed tremendous stress on those congregations and their pastors. Churches had to manage the discontinuities and competing expectations among a wide range of members. The fundamental traditions and values of churches were being

called into question. All of this was a stressful process as people left congregations, leaders left denominations and those who remained in leadership of congregations struggled with the pain of trying to mediate relationships while maintaining the integrity of the traditions and values.

Similar tensions occur between local congregations and denominational systems. Many congregations in North America feel very disconnected from their denominational systems and hold them in contempt. Local churches feel they must give money while receiving very little in return, except rules by which they must operate. The result of this is that many denominational churches operate as independent or free churches—much to the chagrin of the denominational officials whose mandate is to serve various congregations by connecting them and giving them a larger base for ministry, mission, and political influence. This is, indeed, discontinuity.

THE ROLE OF LEADER

In this phase, the leadership role remains based in management skills. There is little thought of the system changing from its stable, traditional ways. Complaining about how people are not as committed as they were is common. The frameworks are not questioned even though the need for flexibility within them is recognized. While the system is coming under increased stress and pressure, the supposition remains that most of the previous ways in which the system has dealt with change and conflict in the past will enable it to deal with the present. Some believe that the system's inherent authority will sustain it in this phase. Events over the past forty years in North America have shown that this simply is not working.

What is church leadership likely to be doing in this phase? While little changes from the prior phase, it becomes more stressful to maintain. Pastors, generally, remain comfortable operating within the stability phase because of training they have received and habits of personality that continue drawing people into this vocation. Lay leaders, though frustrated with the struggles that now are part and parcel of church life, do not ask questions about existing structures or frameworks. Some feel hurt that people no longer want to participate in the church the way they used to. Denominational leaders continue doing what they always have.

At this juncture, leadership usually has little ability to imagine a future other than negotiating micro-change within the system. The basic response of the system is to negotiate relationships within the framework of the tradition. The reality of our own situation in North America is that

the dynamics of change are moving at such a rate that leaders are further and further removed from the stability phase. Trying to manage the challenges sweeping over denominations and congregations from the perspective of the tradition and stability phase will only further marginalize the church today. Yet, in this second phase, even as church systems are shifted and enter into stress, the basic orientation of leadership remains directed toward the maintenance of the traditions. Consequently, these leaders are themselves moving into increased levels of stress and confusion because their ways of leading are becoming less and less congruent with the realities of the context.

Phase Three: Disembedding

STABILITY IS ALL BUT GONE. The power of the tradition, so crucial in earlier phases, no longer has the ability to act like glue holding the system in the place where it has been for a long time. Both internal and external pressures become too great for merely maintenance and management of what-has-been. The systems, and the people in it, are now experiencing increasing levels of distress as they try to manage the challenges from within the frameworks of stability and tradition. Stress is everywhere. Relationships are strained. Systems begin breaking down. Power struggles emerge. Conflict and blaming are common.

Now stress is not necessarily a bad thing. When the first child goes off to college or gets married and sets up his/her own home in another city, the family system is being disconnected from its previous place of stability and tradition. This process is called disembedding. Disembedding suggests the uprooting of deeply connected relationships, beliefs, practices and values. This is a stressful experience; but, it is also a disconnecting that is developmental and necessary.

Not all disembedding has such a clear, developmental necessity attached to it. The disembedding that has been occurring within North American culture and the church is of a different order and kind. In this case, the church is being continuously disembedded from its long-established place at the center of this culture. At the same time, it is also being increasingly disembedded from its own inner story. It is both of these disembedding processes together that are proving to be so difficult at this moment in time. When traditional relationships disconnect, when habits and ways of operating change, these are signals that an entire way of being for the church is in an advanced state of erosion. In an interview for *Books*

& *Culture*, Duke University theologian, Stanley Hauerwas was asked about the greatest challenge facing the church in North America today. His answer was concise and blunt: “It’s very simple: survival” (November/December 1998).

POINTS OF CRISIS

- Debates over removing the denominational name from the church, switching from an organ-hymn-book centered worship to an over-head-guitar based worship are only the superficial signs of a deeper, more pervasive disconnecting and disembedding of the church from both older frameworks of established traditions and its place in the culture.
- Alongside this socio-cultural shift in location, often identified as part of the culture wars, there is also an ongoing conversation, particularly in mainline churches, about the nature and content of the Christian story itself.
- Then, as if these pressures and questions were not sufficient, there are emerging voices from within the churches, like those of Hauerwas, who state strongly that Christians in the West, have fundamentally lost the Gospel story. It has been deeply accommodated and compromised to the categories and ideologies of modernity. In fact, it has lost its core even while holding on, tenaciously, to the habits, traditions and frameworks of a spent Christendom and a denominationalism forged out of Reformation frameworks that no longer cohere in our time.

Each of these elements is a crisis for the church. Together, this mix is creating stress, tension and confusion on a scale never before experienced. The resultant levels of tension and unease within congregational and denominational systems are being magnified to the breaking point in many places.

Several further observations about this phase need to be noted. If modernity has any characteristic that has been pivotal in the church’s loss of place in this culture, it is in the nature of modernity to disconnect all things from the past. The critical turn of mind—observe Descartes’ famous dictum: *cogito ergo sum*—denies tradition or any external source the authority to determine or shape action. The brilliance of modernity, in all its questioning and methodologies for examining reality, is based upon a fundamental presupposition of discontinuity and disembedding from past tradition and any authority other than autonomous reason. There are at

least two critical results. First, the resultant release of energies, in terms of research and the questioning of reality, has created a brief three hundred year period of change unparalleled by any other period in human history. These changes have been so dramatic, so comprehensive, and so pervasive, that we are still struggling to work through their impact on our lives and social systems. Second, all of this change has been done without reference or deference to tradition or the past. The resultant disorientation has created the sense, for many people, of being caught up in a whirl of events they do not understand and are outside their control. This is why, at the close of the twentieth century, we are sailing into a full-blown encounter with the deeply unsettling implications of this radical disembedding through which all social institutions have been wrenched over this last century.

Disembedding is not a by-product of modernity; it is the core agenda. One irony is that the methodologies and systems developing to counteract this disembedding are drawn from modernity. That is why, for example, we have seen the emergence in this century of pastoral leaders (i.e., an attempt to redefine the traditional model of pastor into modernity categories) as efficient managers trained to solve problems. This paradigm of leadership not only deepens the church's loss of identity, but also shapes leaders who look for solutions primarily in the new-and-the-next. These leaders are essentially cut off from any meaningful engagement with the Christian story's response to modernity. One suspects that the current turn among leaders to issues and styles of spirituality is an expression of the growing unease with technique and management models that have pervaded the church for most of this century. (For a review of some of the ways in which this has worked itself out in the area of leadership see the book *Missional Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* in Trinity Press' series *Christian Mission and The Modern World*).

THE ROLE OF LEADER

In this third phase, leadership, as management of roles, habits and traditions of the stable period, will not deal with the stress levels within the systems, nor enable any meaningful engagement with the new social context. Nor will leadership as therapist, or counselor, or chaplain. These are all ways by which the church has accommodated itself to modernity— anxious reframings of Christian leadership in the face of radical disembedding from former traditions. A different kind of leadership response is required. There must now be a shift from management to

other models of leadership. The distinction is important. Managers are, by training and character, people who live comfortably within a stable culture. Leaders anticipate, create and change cultures. For the most part, pastors and denominational leaders have been trained and equipped to be managers, not leaders. Even lay leadership is constructed on a modern management model. Church boards are formulated around the idea of a corporate board. They set policy and direct the paid staff to carry out their wishes. The notion of missional vocation for lay leadership is vague at best.

Managers perform best in phases one and two. They are neither equipped nor gifted at leading in the following phases of change. This presents a huge challenge to both church systems and the current pastoral leadership. These leaders are caught in a phase of change they never anticipated nor were trained to lead. The difference between what is called for and what currently occurs is captured in the following statement. Leadership understands and gives direction in the midst of change and transition. Management administers within a given stable system. The essential problem for pastors and denominational leaders is that they have grown up and learned their skills within stable systems. They have been trained to manage, not lead. The pastoral skills they have learned and developed over many years are important, but no longer sufficient, in terms of where we currently find ourselves.

In these phases of discontinuity and disembedding, the known frameworks of the stable period are no longer operating well. The result of this among leaders is the equivalent of a long series of quakes and aftershocks that keep coming. The expectation is that they will settle down, they will go away and a stable period will return. Thus, the basic orientation of leaders toward these phases is that of struggling through until the system returns to balance. This will not happen. The shocks and quakes just keep coming at us; there is no end to the surprises.

Phase Four: The In-Between World—*Transition*

PHASE FOUR IS THE MOST DIFFICULT of the phases. The previous phases of stability, predictability, and control are long gone. The traditions of a past framework are now disembedded from the culture so that expectations and perceptions of how things ought to work have less and less correlation with what is in fact happening.

A seminary professor working closely with denominational leaders in the San Francisco area expressed this context well when he said,

“Church leaders are faced with a confusing irony. Unwanted change is taking place all around us and we are powerless to do anything about it. At the same time, we are unable to bring about the change that is needed within our own churches” (Church Champions FAX, Volume 3, No. 1, January 12, 1998).

One result is an exponential increase in the levels of distress experienced by congregational and denominational leaders. Contrary to all previous expectation, the ongoing change process, and its resultant churning has not led toward a new period of stability. As a result, within these systems, there is no clarity about what is happening, nor a sense of what the next phase will look like. Despite the new emphasis in some quarters about the next level of church identity and life in North America, the reality for a majority of congregational and denominational leaders is confusion. This phase is about the realities of this place inhabited by confusion and a loss of markers. These are normal and natural elements of living in this period of change. The natural instincts of people are to find stability and equilibrium. The need for control and predictability assert themselves in powerful ways. Usually, such characteristics exhibit themselves in all the various methods and frameworks people develop in order to find a way back to the prior period of stability and tradition.

Many will remember the story of Robinson Crusoe who was shipwrecked on a desert island. The first thing he did was to try to build a boat in order to get back to a life that he lost. The church in North America is doing the same thing, everywhere.

At the beginning of this phase, and for a long time within it, resistance to change is very high. Because of the stress levels created by the experienced loss of control over one's environment, leaders find it increasingly difficult to manage what is happening. In this phase, leaders will have a variety of natural responses to the stress. They will seek to bring external resources into the system that will promise ways of reinstating control without changing the substantive nature of the system. This represents the stress-directed need of returning the system to equilibrium and, therefore, re-establishing control. But the primary goal is to maintain the inner integrity of the system. There is generally little thought put into the question of fundamentally reinventing the system itself. It is important to recognize that this much needed process of reinvention can only emerge following a relatively long period in which the leaders try returning the system to its previous phase of balance. The reinventing process will take a considerable level of intervention to be successful.

Another response to this stress is observed in ways in which fundamentalism re-emerges with promises of restoring the stability and returning those traditions and familiar ways of life. Because people's experience of loss, stress and confusion are so great, many are and will be attracted to simplistic, black-and-white solutions. How long, for example, will we insist that if we simply put prayer back in public schools, all will go well in the land and with our children. Those who offer such notions promise to reduce the complexity of the changes to simple measurements of health and specific steps to renewal. Some explain the stress in terms of struggles for some truth or values. All are attempts to go back.

The normal instinct to return everything to its earlier phase of stability and control is not, however, the only possibility confronting people in this phase. It is also a time of immense opportunity. The potential for something new to emerge is great. The reality of this in-between phase, is this tension between these two options: **to recapture what has been lost or to risk the discovery of a new future**. The focus of this book is on this phase. Phase four is where most congregations and denominations find themselves at this point in time. While it is experienced as a highly stressful period for systems, it is also a phase that must be lived in for a long period of time if there is to be a successful shift into the fifth phase.

Phase Five: Re-Formation

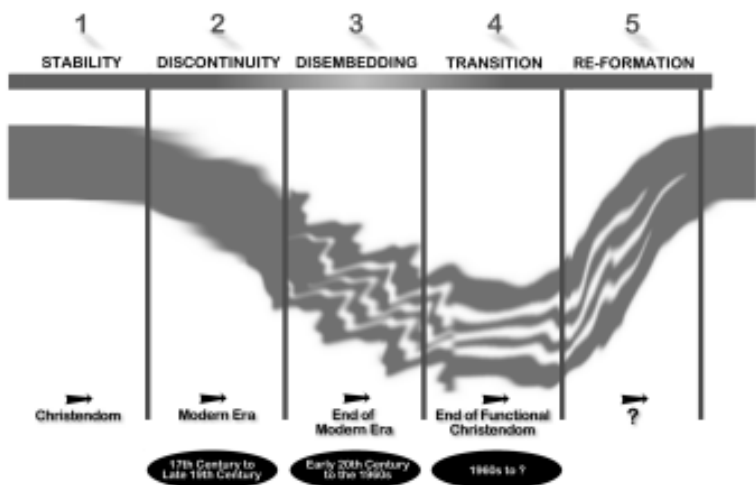
RE-FORMATION DESCRIBES A TIME in the future when the system has moved through the Transition phase to form a new identity. At this point the system that has negotiated the reinventing process enters a period of relative normalcy. A new period of traditioning begins as the system's original story is re-framed in new structures, roles and expectations.

The sustaining story has been re-appropriated, but in such a way that all the frameworks around the story have changed radically. A new language, a new set of roles, and a new set of rules have emerged to reveal structures, and ways of living out the story, that will bear little resemblance to the earlier period of stability. We are nowhere near this period in the life of North American churches. Our social location in this movement of change is just at the beginning of the fourth phase. We have a long way to go and a great deal to do before this fifth phase begins to emerge for us. What kind of churches and denominational systems will emerge through all the processes of change now re-shaping our culture and churches? This

will remain the question before us as we move more deeply into the fourth, or Transition phase.

PUTTING THE PHASES TOGETHER

We have now looked briefly at each of the five phases of change. The following diagram summarizes our discussion of them to this point.



This movement through a series of phases is neither a linear nor a cyclical process. To interpret any given moment or event too literally within this change model will most likely be simplistic. Life is seldom this neat and tidy. Rather, the profundity of this model is that we can find ourselves, our culture and our church systems within the overall flow of this process. That is how the model instructs us. To simply understand that change has a general flow to it gives some comfort, especially when we are in the most stressful phases of it, as we now are.

It is now possible to place some identifying markers along the process of change and reveal our own location within the current change process. These phases are not cut-and-dry. Obviously, the shift from one phase to another will take place over an extended period of time. In this movement there will be periods between each that are themselves transition zones. In these transition zones, the previous phase is being subordinated to the emerging phase. This does not mean that all the

elements of the earlier phase are simply discarded and forgotten. The earlier phases continue to remain in the background as living patterns of memory and habit. They still have the power to affect the current phase, even though now in the background. This is why, in understanding the change process, it is essential to see the overall picture, rather than concentrate on the immediate phase exclusively.

Movement through phases will never be a smooth, uniform progression. Rather, it will be a difficult, uncertain, confusing stop-and-go process with movement back and forth. This has been the character of change throughout the past half-century as the disconnecting process from both modernity and Christendom was accelerating. The forces of the previous three hundred years have gradually disembedded Christianity, and the church, from the cultural center. While the movement was certain and significant, for most of this period, the church was relatively unaware of its dislocation. Over the last fifty years, however, these forces have converged to result in the deep, chaotic changes that are now impacting our churches. During this period, the experience has been primarily one of discontinuity. The assumed and established systems and frameworks within which Christianity functioned were being torn down. Even this example shows that movement through these phases takes place over a long period of time.

The movement of change from a stable, functional Christendom to its present loss of place has been going on over a period of some four hundred years. These shifts are traumatic and difficult. One speculates that, once far enough into the transition phase, the movement toward a re-formation phase will likely be much more developmental and far less traumatic, but this time is still a long way ahead of us and not the character of our present time. The re-forming phase will probably build directly on the in-between phase over a period of two or three generations. There may not be a determinative point or time when it is possible to say that a group or culture has switched over.

Two final important points must be made before we leave our discussion of the phases of change.

- First, the movement from one phase to another has a zone of transition between each, through which the group or culture moves. There are change processes within larger change processes. So within a larger, macro-process of change, there is a micro-process that occurs in its five phases in a similar manner.

- Second, there is also a clearly identified phase in the overall change process which is itself a transition zone and must be understood as a distinct and determinative phase with its own characteristics and purpose within the change process. It is this phase that will be the focus of the next sections of this book.

FOUR IMPORTANT SUMMARY PRINCIPLES

1. Change in any particular moment needs to be understood as part of a series of phases and not simply be looked at in isolation.
2. In the more-or-less stable first phase, which can last a long period of time, the primary skill set is management of the received or inherited traditions and frameworks. Classical pastoral training is shaped by this period. Change is evolutionary and developmental.
3. Beyond the first phase is an increasing need for something more than management. Leadership in these phases is the ability to understand and move a system through a period outside of traditional, stable frameworks.
4. The primary location in which North American culture and the church find themselves is in Phase Four, the in-between phase called **Transition**. The critical task of leadership is to understand and develop skills for leading through this phase.



Change Process and The Biblical Material

THE CHANGE PROCESS can be merely an abstract construct and as such, feel purely academic and separated from real life. To appreciate the power of the model implies discovering ourselves and our church systems within the framework. To do so, we need to reflect upon our life and work within a larger story, the story of God accomplishing God's purposes within human history. First, we must recognize in scripture evidence of this very process in God's work, in dealings with Israel. Second, we must reflect on our own systems as extensions of this same dynamic.

God and Israel: From Formation to Re-Formation

WE BELIEVE THIS CHANGE MODEL has many parallels in **God's** dealings with Israel. The application of the five-phase change model to biblical material provides biblical resources for investigating change and offering insights into how God worked with Israel.

Change was an obvious fact of life for Israel. Massive changes, on the scales we are currently experiencing, were also evident in Israel's history. The change processes we are describing, in fact, are universal in nature; they apply across cultures and throughout history. Yes, we are confronted by significant change in North America. It is a tremendous help, however, to recognize that our particular moment in history is part of an ongoing, normative experience across the currents of history and, especially, in God's encounters with those shaped by a covenant way of life.

The transformations which continually re-shape culture, are never independent of God's activities. Change is part of the interactive dynamic in which a people structure the ways they encounter God in their lives and, at the same time, God encounters a people in a specific context. The biblical material is an overarching story of God's ongoing engagement with a particular people for the sake of the world. Indeed, some of the most

difficult encounters between God and Israel were rooted in the continuing problem between the identity into which God called this people through covenant relationship and the ways Israel enculturated that identity and changed the nature of the covenant relationship.

In our developing outline, we can identify ways in which the five-phase process can be applied to Israel's interactions with God. The phases can be discussed as follows:

1. **Stability:** Israel chooses to live as God's covenant partner, which implies a particular identity and way of life among all the peoples of the earth.
2. **Discontinuity:** As Israel re-frames its life in the land, false images of covenant life emerge. The primary characteristics of covenant living are gradually subsumed and absorbed into the larger culture. As a result, false images of God and covenant lead to false images of their own identity and purpose in the world.
3. **Disembedding:** A crisis of massive proportions overtakes Israel. In 587 Nebuchadnezzar invades the land, destroys the Temple, levels the walls of Jerusalem and transports the best and brightest into exile. This was an unimaginable event for Israel. Because accommodation to the surrounding culture had become so pervasive and accepted, this crisis is experienced as a total shock to the majority of people. The result is a period of chaos. The normal ways of living in the land, through accommodation, fall apart. The alignment of God's kingdom with the values and practices of the dominant culture leave Israel blind to the actual reasons for these events. For almost all of Israel though, including her most senior religious leaders, exile is an unthinkable event; their religious framework of cultural accommodation had become the operational norm for the nation, and the means through which these leaders established identity and power.
4. **Transition:** Babylon is the concrete evidence that Israel has disembedded from her life in Jerusalem. In the trauma of exile, these people must learn how to know God all over again. This involves rediscovering the stories and traditions from a radically new perspective, coming to know themselves in a different way, and learning to see their relationship with their world in a new, redeeming manner. Only by living in this ambiguous world will they be able to reinvent a future for themselves back in Jerusalem.

5. **Re-Formation:** Finally, after a period of exile lasting several generations, Israel begins imagining an alternative future. A new framework emerges to shape their identity among the cultures and reform their relationship to God.

Each of these elements will be commented on briefly as a means of illustrating this process in Scripture. God's covenant with Israel is a foundational theme. This covenant establishes the nature of the relationship. It frames the life of these wandering tribes as they prepare to enter the land promised to them. This covenant is about God's intention to have concrete relationship with a people. Their life will be shaped not only by the memory of the events and agreements of Exodus, but by an ongoing encounter with the One who remains in faithful relationship with Israel. This relationship expressed in the covenant making at Sinai is also embedded in the forms of liturgy, festivals and worship, as well as, in unique expressions of living as God's people. One example was that Israel did not have a king. A stable relationship between God and the people of Israel was defined in the covenant.

LIVING AS GOD'S COVENANT PARTNERS (STABILITY)

In the land, Israel began to settle into a way of life radically different from that of the wandering tribes in the backside of the desert or slaves in Egypt. God intended the relationship framed in desert living and covenant commitment, however, to be the normative way of life in the new land. This involved living in God's protection without a king like all the nations that surrounded them. This latter point underlined the fact that relationship with God was primary and concrete; Israel was to be a people distinct from all the peoples about them, an expression of the fact that these people were shaped by God. What is clear from the texts is that when Israel enters the land they understand themselves as a distinct people shaped by the powerful events of Exodus and entrusted with a mission for the sake of the world. This traditional identity did not hold for very long.

COVENANT LIFE ABSORBED AND SUBSUMED (DISCONTINUITY)

The subsuming of covenant life to the categories of the surrounding culture is amply illustrated through the story of Israel's sojourn in the land. From the demands for a king to the syncretistic worship which absorbed a spectrum of local gods within the liturgical worship of God, Israel's life came to be characterized by a long series of adaptive accommodations.

There was a steady, but continuing reductionism of faith in God to those frameworks and categories of the surrounding peoples. The greatest sources of conflict and tension were precisely this continuing loss of a distinct identity as a people and the ongoing enculturation of almost everything in the life of Israel to that of the surrounding peoples. This gradual shift in identity went largely unnoticed by the people. They grew to assume that keeping holy days and the temple practices was sufficient to fulfill their covenant obligations. This dominant expression of religious faithfulness was deeply embedded in the collective mind of the nation; it was the re-interpretation of the tradition and God's story. Despite the protests of prophets, like Jeremiah, the social consensus of both people and leadership was that all was well in the land and God would remain the staunch defender of their life against all challenges. This attitude pervaded the southern nation, Judah, right up to the Babylonian invasion, the destruction of the temple, and the exile of the population.

CRISIS AND CHAOS (DISEMBEDDING)

What shattered this world was the crisis of invasion and exile. It was the unthinkable! Despite the warnings of prophets, the people had no framework to understand, accept or receive the catastrophic events of 587. This was a crisis not only of politics, but also of faith and identity. It was the loss and ending of a world. The resultant effect on the people was complete disorientation and chaos. This was the meaning of Psalm 137 where the question rang out: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Here was no rhetorical question. It was the anguished cry of a confused people who had lost their world. They were living in the midst of grief, pain and a bottomless anger at this sense of being deserted and abandoned. What they wanted to do was destroy the Babylonians and return to a previous world. Israel had no thought of a new future, at this point. Their pain and passion was for the recovery of their old world. They had been completely disembedded from that world.

MARGINALIZATION (TRANSITION)

In the long period of exile, Israel had to learn that there would be no returning to the former ways of dominance and ascendancy in the old culture of Jerusalem. Exile became the place where the people had to painfully erase the dreams of old Jerusalem from their imaginations. This would not be a sudden process; it would take several generations. Furthermore, in this process of relinquishment, Israel would also have to spend many years

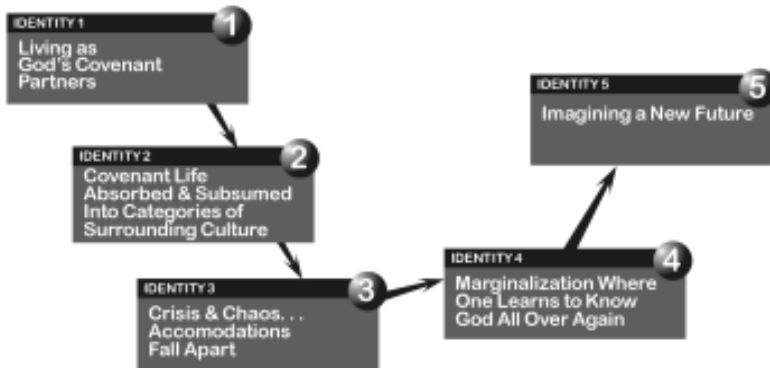
recovering, and rediscovering, all over again, the basic truths about God's story and their tradition. These had been subverted and lost in the long accommodation with the cultures of Jerusalem and the land.

The primary fact of the exile was not the anguish and loss. In the biblical accounts, exile was a hopeful moment in Israel's life. Hosea used the metaphor of the desert and exile as a symbol of God acting like a lover, intent upon wooing and winning back a love that had turned to many others for solace and satisfaction. Exile was always a symbol of God's gracious preparation, not abandonment; Babylon was the place and the period in which Israel had to fundamentally re-think her entire understanding of who God was and the meaning of the tradition they had taken for granted. Only out of this long process could a new imagination, a new identity as God's people, begin to emerge. Babylon and exile were Israel's period of Transition.

IMAGINING A NEW FUTURE (RE-FORMATION)

A new generation of God's people emerged, shaped by the long period of exile and the equally long process of recovering their covenant memory, and they looked toward a return to the land. This is expressed in the Ezra-Nehemiah stories. These stories are not primers in methodologies of leadership—though this is how they are too often used today—they are accounts of a people struggling through the Transition process toward the reinventing of their future. These stories tell us that the passion and leadership for the restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem's walls came from those young leaders raised far away in the Babylonian exile. The renewal of the people and the dream of a new future came directly out of the exile people. Renewal took place with a clear grasp of the cultural issues that were at stake in being a faithful covenant partner with God. The strange, harsh decisions over marriage among Israelites with non-Jews was a stark illustration of how keenly these young leaders understood that the central issues around the exile were rooted in questions of accommodation and absorption in the surrounding culture. The renewal of covenant life involved practicing a way of life that created a clear distinction between the people of God and the other cultures.

These five phases in the diagram below graphically illustrate the movement from stability, down into the depths of transition and the subsequent re-emergence with a new (renewed) identity forged in the fires of the ordeal through which they have passed.



Summary

IT SEEMS TO BE THE CASE that cultures, and groups, regularly go through a process of formation, acculturation, crisis, transition and rebirth. Certainly, there is ample evidence in the Old Testament that this was an ongoing reality for Israel. When we identify these themes in the biblical materials, we can also recognize their presence in our own context. The inter-relationship between the formation of a Gospel people and the surrounding culture is, obviously, far more complex than this simple outline of change. What we do see, however, is that there is something going on in our own time and culture that, while significant and epoch-shifting in character, is neither new, nor unique, to what has already been encountered within the history of Israel in its relationship with God and its surrounding cultures.

As we close this chapter, the change model has been articulated and illustrated from within the experience of God's people, Israel. In the chapters that follow, our focus will turn exclusively to the Transition phase. This is because we believe this is the phase we are now entering as the church in North America. If this is the case, then we need to spend more time understanding this phase, for it is our experience. While there are great threats in such a time, there are also great opportunities for those who will seek to understand and lead through Transition.



Focus on the Transition Phase

AS OUR CULTURE MOVES fully into the 21st Century, the church in North America is disembedded from the central cultural core and pushed to the cultural margins. This is a form of exile called Transition. This chapter provides a detailed description of that phase and a framework for a missional engagement with our culture. While this macro-scale Transition phase may last several generations, it requires that the church be in a process of constructive rebuilding, reinventing, and recovering its identity. It is a time of great opportunity, and a period of great temptation. The instinctive desire to recapture the immediate past is very strong at the beginning of the Transition phase.

This is Our Time to Lead

OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLAR, Walter Brueggemann, writes about our time from the perspective of the prophetic voices that spoke into Israel's exile experience. He states:

I believe we are in a season of transition, when we are watching the collapse of the world as we have known it...the value systems and the shapes of knowledge through which we have controlled life are now in great jeopardy. One can paint the picture in very large scope, but the issues do not present themselves to pastors as global issues. They appear as local, even personal, issues, but they are nonetheless pieces of a very large picture. When the fear and anger are immediate and acute, we do not stop to notice how much of our own crisis is a part of the larger one, but it is (Brueggemann 1986, 45-46).

Brueggemann is describing the world of transition, a world that can only be experienced, at first, as loss and death. The world we have loved

deeply has been pulled from us without our consent. Transition is, therefore, a troubling place in which to dwell. It is now our location, and it will be our location for the rest of our lives. The key issue is how we lead in a time like this when we feel so dislocated and disembedded from our known worlds? How do we reinvent a future when all of the maps that have guided and sustained us for so long no longer seem to reflect the new geography of our disembedded location?

The first step is to understand this new location. The second step is to learn how to embrace and indwell this time and place. This is our time to work out God's purposes for the church in North America. We no longer live in the wonderful days of the fifties, the time when the church held an ascendant place at the center of the public square. That was a time when pastors could lead out of the habits, practices and frameworks of a stable world. Our time and place is this strange world of Transition. There is no other time or place to which God has called us to live and lead. Catholic sister, Mary Jo Leddy, speaks of our time as a period when the great tapestry of religious life that was woven in North America over several hundred years, has unraveled and lies in tatters on the floor of our culture.

We are living through one of those historical in-between times when a former model of religious life (either traditional or liberal) is fading away and a future model has not yet become clear. One could be tempted to flee from the dilemmas of this moment to some more secure past, to the surface of the present, or to some arbitrary resolution of the future. These are real temptations and they can be met only with the faith that this is our hour, our "kairos." This is the only time and place we are called to become followers of Jesus Christ; there is no better time or place for us to live out the mysteries of creation, incarnation, and redemption. These are our times and, in the end, God's time (Leddy 1990, 3).

Percept conducts an annual conference for its regional governing body clients. In 1997, during a plenary address, Mike focused on the fact that there were three years left of this millenium. While the calendar was little more than a historical artifact of how we in the West mark and measure time, it symbolized what all sensed: we were seeing the end of a world while a new one was rising on the horizon. Given this reality, a question was given to these denominational leaders that is relevant to all church leaders. How will we finish the era that is passing, as leaders? This

is a transition question. It is the germane question at this moment in time for church leaders.

This is our time. The generations of leadership that led in the era that is passing are gone. The generations that will lead the church as we pass out of Transition are not yet on the scene, may not even be born. The leaders who must lead the church through this time are reading this text right now. How will we respond to the challenge? Such a time will require extraordinary efforts from leaders. Normal efforts collapse in such environments. Indeed, would-be leaders are confronted with two challenges.

- Are we able to face this new reality? Not all can. Many are incapable of facing the challenge. Some shuffle, become hostile, or simply slip into neutral. Others are equipping themselves to fully embrace what must be done.
- Are we able to guide and direct others through chaos and uncertainty? Some must lead the way forward, even if we are not quite certain where we are going. Real leadership faces into the chaos, and moves.

The Leader's Experience of Transition

CHANGE IS THE UNAVOIDABLE REALITY. It is not possible to lead through this tumultuous period doing more of the same. Running faster and working harder will not work.

World War I was fought along the horrific trench lines that stretched from the North Sea coast of Belgium in the West, near Nieuport, across the northern provinces of France, to the border of France and Switzerland. Millions of men from nations around the world fought and died in that terrible war. The Western Front became a monument to the terrible carnage that poured forth from one of the greatest civilizations of the world. Western culture, after four hundred years of development, believed that it was the most advanced, enlightened and stable culture in human history. Yet, this war radically changed the sensibility of Europe. It fundamentally altered the frameworks out of which the Western mind had been shaped.

No one had experienced war on the scale of that War. Nor was anyone prepared to deal with the new realities of industrialized warfare. **Millions of men died because the generals continued to wage war, using the battle plans they had learned from their teachers, and shaping their tactics according to a world that no longer existed.**

It seems, as one reads the accounts of the battles all along the trench lines, that the generals lived in some kind of detached netherland which bore no correspondence to what was experienced by those in the trenches. Time after time, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were sent over the top of the trenches to march behind one another in disciplined straight lines against the enemy, just as soldiers had done since the Roman armies overran their world. This time, these brave lines of men were mowed down in the hundreds of thousands by the new invention of the machine gun. Yet, generals, like Kitchener, were so deeply embedded in the old world of gentleman soldiering that they could neither grasp, nor adjust, to the enormity of the changes before their eyes. All they could do was replace the dead with a new batch of the living who, in turn, were mowed down by the guns.

In the same way, we cannot keep on using outworn frameworks and approaches. After we recognize that we are confronted with constant change, and understand the ways we are responding to this change, then, we need to develop new leadership strategies for this time.

Only a short time ago, a myriad of models and training schemes emerged from the relatively new field of change management. This new discipline was a key response to the dislocations caused by the rapid pace of change. But even in this area of expertise, developed explicitly for dealing with change management, was the recognition that strategic solutions to change were not, in themselves, sufficient. Something more was needed.

Organizational turbulence had much to do with the ways people were responding to the escalating levels of change. Without a significant awareness of these response mechanisms in people, change strategies continue to founder and fail to impact the organization no matter how well conceived or how well implemented. Strategies for change are bound to fail unless there is a serious commitment to understand the response mechanisms within people who are forced to deal with the swirl of continual change. This requires leaders to understand how people are responding.

In the Transition phase, responses are the most critical element for us to understand. Some of the key transition questions follow. What are the responses to change? How are they managed? Through what types of experiences must people be led? The ability to understand and guide people through the inner dynamics of Transition is a primary leadership skill required for this phase of change.

Whenever destabilization occurs, people naturally look in two directions for ways of returning their worlds to points of control and stability. First, they look for ways of returning the organization to its prior place of stability. Second, they will seek out the nature of the new future. In both cases of return and future, the road maps don't exist. The old road maps will not work. As yet, no new map exists that can point the way toward an emerging framework. These are in-between times. We are betwixt and between, and we need new competencies to deal with new realities.

SOME CAUTIONS

From modernity, comes the conviction that life is linear—it moves forward in a straight line. We see this at work in the ways we respond to challenges that confront us. We have been trained to move through a well-established pattern of response to change. Usually that response will have some of the following elements in a similar sequence.

1. gather information about the problem,
2. analyze the elements,
3. work out a plan of action,
4. figure out potential problems in the plan of action,
5. develop a communication process with feedback systems, and
6. initiate a solution by moving through a series of steps and this will result in successful change.

A second, unexamined assumption, connected to the first, is that we can have, or can develop, the technological, management and strategic skills necessary to make a successful change process happen almost in a seamless manner. It's a little like doing a jigsaw puzzle. If you simply line up all the pieces and go about the process logically, then everything will come out fine.

No simple, linear set of techniques will make everything work. We certainly need theory and models to understand what is happening—indeed, that is what we are attempting to do here. We also need skills in helping people through transitions. But don't be fooled into thinking the road will be smooth. It won't. People are complicated. Life is untidy and our natural proclivity to resist change runs deep. We live within a series of intricate and enfolded systems interwoven in a complex web of

relationships. In the Transition phase, this complexity makes it almost impossible to apply the linear, step processes that often worked well in the more stable, traditional phase where core values remained unchallenged and unchanged. We have moved into a phase where our old world of logic and reason has come unhinged from outcomes. Complexity, discontinuity, intuition and feeling now characterize and dominate this time period. People's emotional and non-rational responses are going to play a larger part in the outcomes of our transition processes and congregational identities. People's intuitive, soft-data sense of you, as a leader, and what you are about, will count far more than any program or strategies you develop.

What is the point? Don't assume you can apply change principles like a template or jigsaw puzzle. That is the old world. Even as we struggle to use a logical-sequential medium, such as a book, to explain Transition, we recognize Transition does not easily allow itself to be described.

Daryl Conner describes one of the characteristics of change in our time with the phrase "the Entangled Labyrinth." We don't simply move from one stage to another by first leaving behind one distinct set of skills or characteristics and then taking on another. Human beings do not function like snakes that shed their skins and then move on. We progress, he states, "dragging baggage from the previous experiences—our unmet aspirations, unrealized potential, and unresolved problems as well as our budding talents and honed skills." What we are, in fact, is a tangled web, an intricate network of an accumulated self and a set of new potentials. We, humans, are not linear, easily understood organisms that can be led by simple, straight-line strategies. The complexity of our personal interactions and responses shapes our responses to change. Conner's summary of these facts is vital to our discussion: "Those leaders who fail to grasp the depth of the challenge that change entails often appear caught off-guard when they introduce initiatives that they hoped would "settle things down" (Conner 1998, 15-16).

There is a lot of ambiguity in leadership today. It comes from the fact that we are like Robinson Crusoe, who, having been swept away from a well-known place, needed to engage in a journey of discovery on an island where nothing was familiar. Fortunately, he was created to be an explorer with a penchant for journeying by the author. Most pastors and denominational leaders are, by nature, more comfortable with managing the known world than exploring a desert island. Our changing situation requires us to develop the skills of an explorer. A more contemporary

challenge would be to become more like the Apollo astronauts strapped to the top of a somewhat controlled and directed explosion and thrust into space. The unknowns are huge. We will encounter many areas that call for skills we don't have and will only learn along the way. That is why the language of journey is so crucial for our self-understanding as leaders. We need to embrace a new kind of adventure as leaders.

Most of the people in our congregations will not want to go through this Transition phase. Their most powerful instincts will be longing for a leader who functions like the classical pastor because such an image and role connects with the basic, instinctive desire to return to an earlier, stable phase. This is what makes this Transition phase so challenging. It may very well be that many churches will remain strong cores of resistance. We need to be prepared for that outcome.

Understanding Transition

CHANGE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO US. We have little or no control over change. It's out there, all around us, and happening all the time. Transition is our inner response to change. Leaders in the decades ahead had better know how to deal with the transitions, not just understand the changes, or they will be run over by people's reactions.

Transitions are continually occurring between the various phases of change. This is not a simple, linear pattern. We are in the flow of a river that does not have easily marked distinctions between one place and another. This particular phase of change is, itself, a **Transition phase**, with two seemingly paradoxical movements: the letting go of the old world and its values, and the re-entering of our traditions. We must understand both of these movements if we are to lead effectively through Transition.

Letting Go: Transition, as a macro-phase, is about the ending of the stable and the tearing of core values out of their embedded place. In Transition, people are forced to let go of core, heart commitments, beliefs, values, and practices—understandably, a very difficult demand. Such a challenge will be resisted. Part of leading in Transition includes helping people face and address this resistance. Until people are able to move through a process of identifying and letting go of the old world, it is impossible for them to move on toward the next phase of re-forming the life and identity of the group.

Re-Entering Our Traditions: At the same time, the only way to enter this process of letting go is by re-entering one's tradition and core

stories. This element will require considerable explanation. The first issue to work through is what we mean by our tradition and core stories. Inevitably, the longer a culture, or group, remains embedded in a stable period of time, such as the long Christendom period in North America, the more that period of stability comes to be identified with the same reality as the core stories and traditions of the community. In fact, the ongoing development of a stable period absorbs and accommodates the core story to its own categories. This, as we will see, is precisely what happened to the Christian story through the long years of Christendom and, especially in the last several centuries, through its successive accommodations to modernity.

A foundational conviction of this book is that the kind of future which the North American church needs to embrace is not found primarily through the development of technique, nor even by using the best skills of management theory. As important as these skills will be, the central need of the churches in the Transition period is to recover the biblical story and recreate our missional identity out of that encounter. This is basically the same task any missionary must undertake when s/he encounters a new culture. There is first the task of disembedding the core Gospel story from the missionary's own cultural framework—at least as much as is possible—and then there is the task of understanding the new cultural context and looking for ways to translate the core story across the cultural barrier. For the missionary, this is a transitional experience. We are suggesting here that we now face the need to do basically the same thing within the North American context.

Experience of Transition



IN TRANSITION, it's not just one or two things we are letting go of within a stable system. The fulcrum has shifted and a whole world has been

disembedded. But even within that single, massive fulcrum shifting reality—from the world of modernity and a functional Christendom to the new world of postmodern reality, denominational ambiguity, and the end of Christianity’s privileged status—there are continual shifts. These shifts keep us off balance, while enhancing the experience of being out of control. Those core values that worked for congregations and denominations in the old world, no longer work in the in-between world.

RESPONSE IN TRANSITION

The extent of change through which our whole culture has been wrenched during this century alone has torn apart all the accepted moorings and broken havens taken for granted. Surely, a large part of current return to Reformation idioms of liturgy and worship are themselves this double-edged struggle to reconnect with our tradition and to recover our moorings. Certainly in the wider culture, the anchor points that gave stability to our lives are largely in the past, or the nostalgic creations of the media. Young people express the conviction that any foundational relationships, like marriage, will not last. A television persona like Ally McBeal represents the new incarnation of the liberated woman. She is anxious, somewhat confused and vulnerable. She is also disembedded—there are no permanent relationships that surround her, no family, no roots, just events and encounters. There is the longing for foundations and relationships that are permanent, but there is no sense of hope or expectation that these can ever be found.

TWO IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF TRANSITION

1. In the Transition phase, we must understand the way people are responding not just the changes that have taken place.
2. The Transition phase is not primarily about getting to a new location. It is about reconnecting with the core story and tradition so that they are freed from the old frameworks. When this happens, there is freedom to recognize the values and frameworks that must be released so that our systems can move toward the reinventing of a missional future.

Several examples from ordinary life will illustrate how Transition is more about our responses to change than the changes themselves.

- After five years of marriage you have a child. You not only embrace the new life into your midst, but you will

begin to let go of the care-free, pick-up-as-you-will and do-your-own-thing lifestyle you once enjoyed so much in order to be a new parent.

- After some 20 years of family life, the kids have grown up and left home. You rejoice in the new found freedom, but feel strange inside at the loss of conversation around the table and those moments of interaction that can't be scheduled into calendars.
- You take a great job across the country in a wonderful part of the world. The salary is great, the job perks are wonderful and you are excited about the move. But there is so much to let go of: the neighbors you've become friends with over ten years, the work associates who have become very close, aging parents who are now a five-hour flight away rather than an hour's drive. Excitement and turmoil fight inside you. Your body starts to feel sick, you get pains in your chest and feel disoriented. The doctor tells you not to worry; it's not an impending heart attack, but the stress of Transition.

Change requires Transition. Something must be let go in order to enjoy the new future that lies before you. Some changes are not that significant. Others are, emotionally, very costly. Some years ago my wife and I moved to the West Coast of Canada from Toronto. In doing so, we left our son and daughter in universities back in the East. I was regularly flying back to the eastern part of the U.S. and would always schedule my travels through the city where my kids were living. I will always remember leaving them to travel on again somewhere else. The pull and sense of loss were far beyond anything I could have imagined. Many a time on a January day in the bitter cold of an Eastern city, I stood on the street watching one of my kids walk toward a subway and could hardly believe that I'd chosen to move so far away. Many a time I wanted to turn the clock back and return to my former world so that I could have back all those cozy times at home with my children. I still remember saying goodbye to my daughter one winter afternoon, then walking into a friend's home. She asked me how my kids were and I just burst into tears. Transition is a hard thing.

Imagine it's not just one or two changes like an office re-organization, a new reporting system in the multi-national or a move across the country. Imagine that it's a whole world of change, seemingly, all at once. This is our Robinson Crusoe experience. We can look at what this might mean by examining a set of changes that are completely outside our own world of experience. Instead, we turn to the observations of anthropologists in pre-modern cultures.

Rites of Passage in Pre-modern Societies

WHEN ANTHROPOLOGISTS STUDIED pre-modern societies, they observed some very interesting social rituals and rites of passage ceremonies. Referring to these as “transition,” Victor Turner outlined three phases:

1. separation—losing an old world
2. margin (liminality)—entering an unknown world
3. reaggregation—re-emerging into a new world (Turner 1974, 94).

For the purposes of our discussion here, we shall focus on the first two.

Rites of passage are deeply embedded in these tribal cultures. Modern societies have lost many of those rituals of social recognition that transition people from one stage of life to another. Rites of passage are ways of ritualizing the stages of life and placing them in a larger framework of meaning—baptism, marriage, and funerals.

In pre-modern societies, rites of passage lie at the core of the culture’s identity; they have religious significance. There are a wide variety of rites in such cultures. Some are gradual and developmental, others sudden and traumatic. The latter are the focus of attention in this discussion. Pubescent males in a tribal society are suddenly removed from the long-term stability that has shaped all of their lives from birth to puberty. This illustration provides us with a window into what is happening to people in our culture as we are thrown into the massive Transition reshaping Western societies.

SEPARATION

Anthropologist, Victor Turner, observed the first stage as separation. In such cultures, the females in the tribe raise young boys from birth until puberty. They have little or no connection with the adult males. Consequently, the world of childhood is shaped by relationships with women. Nurturing, domestic help, games and security would characterize their stable world. The young male’s framework of what it means to be a boy would be formed in terms of females. Then, suddenly, with the onset of puberty, adult males ritually descend on the village, literally snatching the boys from the female protectors who have given them their identity and security. The boys are removed from the village and taken to an

isolated location deep in the forest where they have no skills or frameworks for functioning. This event signals the end of a stable world. It immediately propels the boys into a world of anxiety over which they have no control. Here, suddenly, is a world in which their habits of living no longer work. They begin their rite of passage by being suddenly separated from the only world they have known and compelled to enter a traumatic, in-between world of Transition.

LIMINALITY

The next stage of this rite of passage is given the technical term of liminality. The term will be used because it is a new word to most people. As such, it doesn't bring with it a lot of our own interpretations. We can invest it with meanings that help us talk about what is happening with Transition in our world. Put simply, the word describes the processes that go on within people when they are separated from their stable worlds and core values, then placed in an in-between world. Liminality is very much like the experience of Robinson Crusoe when he was shipwrecked on a desert island. The shipwreck itself represents his separation from the world he has known and is skilled in managing. The core values of that world no longer seem to work in the new situation. The desert island represents this liminal state—it is a place so different that all the old rules of living are brought into question. It is a place where even the most experienced naval captain who is able to navigate around the world and through terrible storms, is now thoroughly disoriented.

TWO ELEMENTS OF LIMINALITY

Exploring this liminal situation reveals two elements making up a single experience of in-between living.

I. The external event: On one side is the external event itself—the change that has occurred to the person from the outside. Suddenly, an event occurs and one is being placed at the margins, on the outside of all familiar frameworks. Crusoe was shipwrecked by a storm that destroyed his boat. The boat is a wonderful image of the stable worlds we create (what Berger calls the sacred canopy) that give meaning and stability in a world of potential chaos. Huge forces beyond his control destroy the boat. People who have been terminated from their jobs because of downsizing might be able to identify with this situation. External forces dramatically change the reality of one's life. This is the first side of the liminal—the external events over which we have little or no control.

2. The inner responses to that new situation: The new environment bewildered Crusoe. The time clock and rituals of the ship, so comforting and reliable, were gone. For the executive who has been downsized suddenly, all the customary habits and events that have prescribed his/her life are taken away. She no longer has the identity that has given meaning and purpose. She is suddenly erased from the picture and delegated to the waste paper basket. In the shower at home, violent shaking may seize her. It is not unusual for a such a person to vomit, as mind and body react to the fact that a world has been taken away. These are inner responses to the experience. She may be confused, bewildered, depressed, feel as if her whole identity has been stolen. Angry, she may try to figure out how they could have done such a thing to her.

THE PAIN AND THE POTENTIAL OF LIMINALITY

The event and the feelings connected with the event are both part of the experience of **liminality**. This two-sided reality has brought the individual, or group, into a whole new situation described as a **threshold** experience. The term **threshold** suggests both the pain and potential of the liminal setting. Here again is a two-sided reality. On one side is the pain: the experience of loss, the negation of everything that has been considered normal, the grieving for what has been taken away. Again, Crusoe went through this many times during his imposed sojourn on the desert island. Moments of bitter longing would come for what he had lost. On the other side was the potential for something else. Crusoe would discover himself in ways that he could not in the secure, routine, stability of the ship. On the desert island, he began to be transformed as a new identity emerged. The reason for calling this liminal situation a **threshold** experience is because it creates a complex tension between the two poles of wanting to recover the lost past, on the one hand, and to discover the transformed identity, on the other. In the early stages of the liminal process, it is the first side that is uppermost.

The pubescent boys are unwillingly taken from the normal roles and relationships experienced all through their lives. They are placed in a location where none of their skills or coping-mechanisms will work. In this situation a whole series of confusing responses emerge. They may not appear all at once, but they will characterize the experience of being taken out of one world and placed in another. Here is a list of some responses:

Confusion: A simple experiment will help one understand what must be happening inside people struggling with this new world. Ask a group of people to take a pen and write two sentences quickly dictated to them. Then, ask them to place the pen in their other hand. Dictate two new sentences as quickly as the first and don't repeat anything you have said. Pause and ask people to feedback their responses, describing what was going on inside of them. Confusion arises from the need to function in a way that is outside their training and expectation. Now, tell people they must write with this hand for the rest of their lives and they have no options but to comply. This will lead to another set of responses.

Discomfort and Anger: When people are left in this awkward location and compelled to function in ways outside their comfort zones, the normal response is anger. That anger will be diffuse because people will not have had the time or emotional space, yet, to understand what is occurring to them. They will strike out at whatever might symbolize the source of their discomfort.

Instinctual Desire to return and re-capture the old world: Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, the Hebrew slaves in the desert outside Egypt, or Crusoe trying to build a boat from the remains of the ruined ship—all people want to do is find a way back home. In the church it is expressed in some of these questions. How do we fill the empty pews with new people? How do we become seeker sensitive? How do we do evangelism? How do we turn our denominational systems into a resource tool for the churches?

The Old Skills and Identities no longer work but there are, as yet, neither new skills nor identities: This is the ambiguous sense of being out of control, exposed and unable to see what the demand and challenges might be that have to be faced. Because of this tension, the instinct to create the illusion that little has changed, or to integrate change resources into present organization is very high.

These are the responses that make the liminal situation so hard. We feel all these things but don't know what to do next. The pubescent males, once removed from the females and placed in an isolated location, must pass through all these experiences. What helps them go through this Transition, is precisely the single most important resource we have lost in modern cultures—a larger religious framework that gives meaning to what is happening

to them. The anxiety and confusion are placed within a religious context. What they experience occurs under a sacred canopy that not only ameliorates the liminal process, but also gives it meaning and purpose. This is what we have lost in modern societies. The kind of global, fulcrum-shifting transition we are facing takes place without a larger framework of meaning.

DIMINISHED RITUALS—INCREASED CHOICES

In modern societies rites of passage hardly exist any longer. Strong rituals giving people a larger framework of meaning in which to live have been displaced. What we live with are fragments of these events that remind us of a way of life that has passed. Modernity has de-privileged tradition. This agenda was carried out with the express purpose of liberating humanity from what were perceived to be the suffocating bonds of tradition. Consequently, as we enter the 21st Century, rituals that were once perceived as essential for sustaining cultures, have become little more than echoes of a past. This has occurred at precisely the moment when pervasive changes, pressing through the culture, require the existence of rituals that provide a broader meaning base. In this loss of ritual as a primary meaning system, we can see how our culture has been disembedding itself from the core values of the earlier, stable phase.

Coupled with the diminishment of ritual practices is an increase in the plurality of choices. People often remark, somewhat nostalgically that life used to be so much simpler. Nostalgic or not, this is certainly true. Cultural pluralism and rapid technological changes and innovations present each of us with a dizzying array of options. A common psychological phenomenon is the experience of stress from dealing with so many choices.

Together, both these forces of modernity produce a fragmentation of prior core values across a culture. While freedom of choice is celebrated, few are able to live very well outside a stable framework of meaning. This is part of the reason people feel isolated and disembedded from the culture. We experience our lives more like Robinson Crusoe than *Father Knows Best*. We live in a time when the rites that express core values are thin, limited more to emphasizing the solo, individual nature of modern life. As a result, we are rapidly losing those communal skills of inter-relatedness and living with others in a larger framework that were, until recently, taken for granted. The thinness of our social relationships, coupled with the individualistic nature of our identity, means we have far fewer coping-mechanisms compared to those found in societies where rites of passage remain embedded within the corporate structures of social life.

Furthermore, rites of passage in pre-modern societies occur within a spiritual framework. This is what sociologists call a sacred canopy. Peter Berger first used this term in his book, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967). He used the term to explain the relationship of religion to everyday life. The sacred, or religious life, is the means by which cultures sustain themselves. Religion provides a culture with particular meaning by connecting it with a larger framework of explanation. As such, religious life provides a plausibility structure for a culture's life. This will only remain so, as long as people articulate this plausibility structure in their conversations and dramatize it in their social interactions. The latter is what rituals are meant to do.

These brief comments help to show the extremely close connection between religion and culture, between the sacred and the core values of a culture. Rites of passage, until very recently in modern culture, have been a significant religious symbol that signaled and transmitted the core values of a culture. The weakening of such rites gives evidence that these core values have become disembedded in the culture of modernity.

It is the particular overarching religious framework, or sacred canopy, associated with Christendom that has been removed in modern cultures. In periods of such major transition the core value resources that were available for interpreting and adapting to changes no longer have the power to bring stability. Charles Handy describes the absence of a more transcendent view of life and the purpose of life (Handy 1997, 3). Modernity's agenda of autonomy replaced the religious framework of Christendom with new myths and ideologies. These metanarratives, or alternative religious frameworks, were expressed in such new myths as the pervasive reign of economics and the invisible hand, the autonomy of the individual, the inevitability of progress, dialectical materialism, the foundational nature of the irrational and the unconscious and so on. It is precisely these new myths, representing the religious frameworks of modernity, that are tumbling down in the shift of the fulcrum leaving contemporary people largely without the resources to manage the Transition process being thrust upon them.

The church resides within this world and has imbibed much of its ethos. Yet, it also remains one of the few places in our culture where, potentially, there remains the possibility of exploring tradition again, in order to recover and build bridges across to a different kind of life and identity. An important skill needed by leaders in this situation is the ability to provide fragmented congregations with the resources to connect with a core story in a way that sustains and nourishes their lives as they move through Transition.

SPIRITUALITY REPLACES CHRISTIANITY

It is exactly at this point of possibility that the challenge of our modern world complicates things. In modern societies the religious/spiritual frameworks have been split off from the larger public order of life. Religion has become privatized and individualized, further removing it from becoming a meaning-giving resource that lies outside the individual. In our situation, religion has become a consumer product. It is now repackaged, designed to meet the needs of the self rather than provide a transcendent framework of meaning and a larger perspective than the self's own needs. This is the reason for the current shift in North America from conversation about religion in general, or Christianity in particular, to discussions about spirituality. Spirituality is an amorphous word with little or no content in it, until the individual comes along to place his/her own content within the word. Thus, spirituality is a shifting symbol; it can be made, and re-made, to continually fit the moving need of one's inner self. Spirituality is a self-referential, solipsistic shopping basket for the religious consumer who visits the mall of religion to take what s/he needs for the construction of his/her own self. Consequently, religion is increasingly unable to help people engage and move through the Transition process. Indeed, because it has been transposed into such a profoundly devious consumer item, the new seekers of spiritual product come to religious institutions, like churches, with powerful reactive responses. They want consumer items that will stop the churning of their worlds. They will react in very powerful ways to church systems that suggest that they need to engage the painful process of letting go of a world. Within an individualized, privatized religious framework, Transition is experienced as a series of disruptive events that attack and undermine the focal center of the world: one's personal, inner spiritual life.

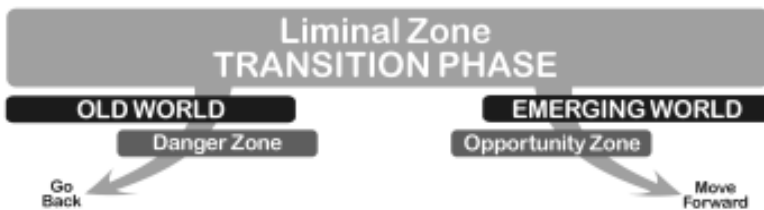
Even though the experience of **liminality**, as a threshold event, is the same in both modern and pre-modern cultures, the former has far fewer mechanisms for helping people cope than the latter. This lack of religious framework makes Transition more difficult in our contemporary context.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIMINAL EXPERIENCE

1. People will always experience this as loss.
2. An important characteristic to recognize about a liminal Transition process is that it is a place where people will have to live for a time. You will not be able to rush a congregation through the transition.

3. The majority of people will have no idea what they are experiencing.
4. Transition is an emotional state. The confusion, disequilibrium, and inner impulse to re-capture what has been lost cannot simply be switched off by information or images of an exciting new world.
5. Leaders can easily make the mistake of assuming that information is all that is needed in order to move on to the next change phase, the next adventure in this new, emerging world. This would be a serious mistake.
6. People in Transition are in an in-between stage.
7. It is a time of either regression or opportunity.

The diagram below captures the interaction between these characteristics.



Two Potential Responses to Transition

EACH OF THESE seven elements can create a situation that, if not given the appropriate leadership, will result in two types of responses. Each will cause stress in the congregational system and block the Transition process. In response to being placed in this in-between stage, people will do one of two things if pushed too hard, too soon. They will either engage in *fright and flight* or *fright and fight*.

Fright and Flight: In the first instance, people will deal with the tension, confusion and anger by simply abandoning the congregation and heading for one that tells them nothing really needs to change, by offering all the symbols of the previous, stable phase. Such leaving will often be couched in the language of spiritual health such as: the church is no longer faithful to the traditions of the denomination, or, the pastor no longer preaches the Gospel. Either way, these people can no longer live in the loss or the ambiguity and will leave.

Fright and Fight: In the second instance, *fright and fight*, people deal with the liminality and Transition by choosing to draw lines in the sand. They will fight the leadership, especially the pastor, as being the source of the problems. Again, such fighting will be couched in a spiritual language. There may be accusations of too much change too fast, of the leadership neglecting to pastor and care for the people, not enough consultation, or top-down leadership. Each of these responses signals that people do not understand, are overwhelmed and unable to deal with change introduced into the church's life. Unless such signals are read and responded to appropriately, the Transition phase will get stuck or shut down for quite a period of time. The congregation will then work at discovering ways of reverting back to some form of their early experiences. Obviously, this is stressful for the leader and the congregation. The most likely scenario will be that strong, traditionally minded people, with loyalties to the immediate history of the congregation, or denomination, will remain as the system gradually dwindles in size over time. The habit at this juncture is to revert to a pastor-type chaplain who will manage the needs of an increasingly aging congregation.

These two variants of the same response to the Transition phase often reside in people with highly responsible leadership positions in their daily jobs. In those contexts, such people deal with change and Transition issues everyday. They are often the champions of such changes; however, these people seem unable to recognize or appreciate the same processes in the context of their church. For many, religious life has been reduced to little more than a personal spiritual bulwark for individuals in a hard world. Each of these factors creates the expectation that church is not the same as the world outside. It serves a different social function in people's lives. Because the self has come to occupy the role in modern culture once reserved for the transcendent, the core values of religious symbols (like pastors, worship services, denominational government) have shifted over to represent the inner needs and drives of the self.

This is why the language of religious consumerism is used to describe churches today. This is not merely a superficial trait noticed in such things as the loss of loyalty to churches. It means that religious symbols at the core level of values have come to serve the needs of the self. Consequently, in a phase of massive global and social Transition, the churches have come to symbolize one of those few places in the culture where people will not allow change to occur. The symbol of church becomes endowed with the value of personal haven and stable presence for the disembedded self,

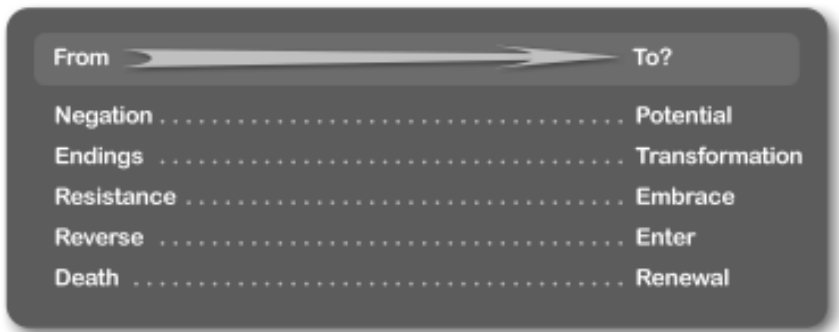
available when needed. The expectation of this kind of religious consumer self is that one will receive spiritual services that match one's particular taste and preferences at any particular time. These preferences keep changing, which is why congregations keep changing their styles as means of competing for numbers of these religious selves.

Here is the powerful public-private, sacred-secular split running through the imagination of postmodern people. It is a weak and shifting foundation upon which to build a support and meaning system when the Transition phase is present. **How do we lead people within this Transition phase?** Note that the language is not about leading **through** but **within** this phase. The skills leaders need are those required in an extended period where the future has not yet taken form.



Leading Within Transition

WE FIND THAT EVERY ASPECT of life in North America has moved into a time of great Transition between a world that is quickly passing away and a world that is yet unformed. The in-between time is a continuum from the negation of an old world to the embracing of a new one. The following illustration summarizes what we have developed about the liminal, Transition phase to this point.



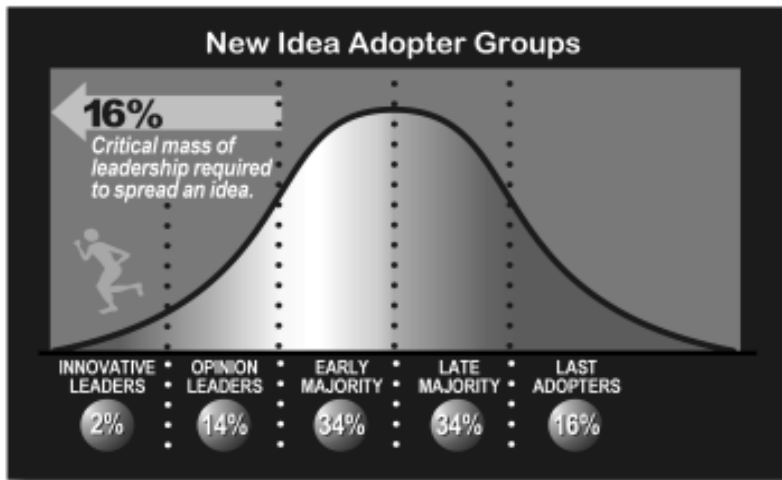
One response to this diagram would be to locate people in a congregation at various points along the line according to their attitudes or responses to a proposed change process. Similarly, a denominational system could use the same approach when introducing a new strategy or resource to its churches. This method does make sense of the way people respond to change proposals. It also lends itself to the further development of change strategies. A major resource and guide for many church and denominational leaders seeking to get some control of the change mechanisms within their systems is found in the work of John Kotter. Kotter emphasizes the importance of making something happen within a system. His book, *Leading Change*, is designed to help leaders do just that. He presents an eight-stage process for moving a system through a major change process (Kotter 1996, 21).

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency
2. Create a Guiding Coalition
3. Develop a Vision and Strategy
4. Communicate the Change Vision
5. Empower Broad-Based Action
6. Generate Short-Term Wins
7. Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change
8. Anchor New Approaches in the Culture

As the list indicates, this is a strategy to make something happen. The book offers a step-by-step change process, offering extremely helpful resources for leading a change process within a system. This methodology has been used extensively in teaching churches, such as Willow Creek, to help those attending their leadership conferences grasp how to introduce new programs, like Seeker Services, into their structures. People may miss several obstacles in such an approach.

1. It is critical to realize the level of change we are describing. We are dealing with a situation in which the culture, the world or framework, of a group has come to an end. We are dealing with the reality of liminality. Within the five-phase change model described in this book, there are critical factors at work, especially in the Transition phase, that make it very difficult to lay a linear, logic-driven model of change on a congregation.

2. A second problem in simply applying this approach to our situation is the way it identifies people in terms of their responses to change. People are situated within a range of categories that characterize their responses. The categories move from innovative leaders to resisters. The model can be diagrammed as follows:



Adopted from *Leading Change*, by John P. Kotter, 1996

Every group will have a variety of personality types who change at various rates. Understanding the dynamics of this process is important and the model above is helpful in appreciating them. The change process cannot be viewed as linear. It is taking place within a larger system of meaning where core value systems have become disembedded and people's responses to the Transition, or liminal phase, are neither linear nor a matter of simple management strategy. Change within a phase is not the same as transition. This type of change strategy cannot account for all the complex interactions within transition. The model developed in this book describes far more than just the normal processes of organizational change and its effective management. We must understand the dynamics of a profound and far-reaching process of fulcrum-shifting transformations and their effects on groups like congregations. The question is not: how do we lead a congregation through all the changes identified in the strategic plan? The question is: how do we lead congregations and denominational systems through massive, epoch-changing transformations? What do we do when the ship has been wrecked in a huge storm, landing our crew on a strange desert island? Granted, specific change events will need to take place as part of a larger response to this setting. That is why the language of **liminality** and **Transition** is so helpful—these words help us to recognize that we are dealing with something much bigger than introducing a new program or ending a certain event or staff position in the church.

To show the complexity of the **Transition phase**, the diagram needs to be extended at several levels. Two additional elements now need to be

added to the diagram. The Transition process cannot be conceived of as a straight line along a continuum that is progressing toward a new identity.

An equally crucial set of responses, namely, the instinctive desire of people to move back to the original zones of comfort and familiarity, exists in the liminal situation all along that continuum. All through the Transition process is a **back-folding** movement where people are continually trying to recapture what has been lost. Leaders, naturally, experience this as resistance. What confront the leader are deep-seated habits and emotions that drive this back-folding resistance process. Leaders will approach their congregational and denominational systems aware of the fact that they are not managing plans to change a system, they are leading among a people struggling with the transformation of a **culture**. The commitments and values that have acted like compasses guiding life and gyroscopes giving balance have stopped working. Now, the world has shifted; the fulcrum has changed directions. These cultures, formed through the long history of Christendom and modernity are now obstacles rather than resources for growth.

The culture of modernity and a functional Christendom have come to an end. Many positive elements were in the core values of this passing, stable world. We have emotional and intellectual investments in those values. Furthermore, over long years, people within a stable culture develop all kinds of ways of suppressing and denying information or experiences that run counter to the basic belief systems and social values of the old culture. The worship wars are a graphic illustration of this tension and resistance. Our diagram can now be expanded to indicate this other dynamic of liminality—the constant instinct to return and recapture the core values of the previous, stable phase.

This **back-folding** resistance within church systems is itself only one small element in a complexity of multi-level Transition through which people are being taken today at every level of their lives. Certainly, this is the one church leaders will tend to focus on the most because it has to do with the process of Transition within the congregational systems and their self-understanding as part of a post-Christian context, which no longer endorses or gives privileges to any tradition. But at the same time, it is not only the congregation that is being forced into the Transition process. Congregational change is one aspect of a far more profound Transition process working its way through the whole culture.

In effect, what church leaders encounter in their people is not a single level of liminal, or Transition phase change. They are encountering people who

are being forced through the Transition phase at multiple levels where the church community, by default, is given a lower ranking in the order of what people are able to deal with in terms of addressing these transitions. Again, without understanding the dynamics of this larger process, leaders will have difficulty managing the Transition process within their own system. This second level of Transition can be illustrated in this way.



Anyone in congregational leadership today has some understanding of how this deep level of transformation of our culture is affecting people in our churches and denominational systems. Perhaps a few illustrations will help make the connection with what many leaders are experiencing.

- Think of the 55 year-old executive who returns from a business trip to be informed by the CEO that his position is no longer required. He has a six-month severance package and help from an agency that gets people through these changes. Imagine what this person wants from his church community. What kind of expectations will he have of a church when his whole life is being turned upside down? What will be his response to the proposal of a church change strategy?
- Imagine you are the parent of a 15 year-old teenager. You know how to raise babies and share life with a pre-adolescent but this is a different story. What happened to that little girl who went to church with her parents and thought they were the center of her universe? She is discovering that there is a huge world of choices and options out there. The parent's world and beliefs

happen to be only one of a multitude clamoring for her attention and she wants to try a few out. On top of that, the church is battling over what kind of emphasis they want in youth ministry. Does it focus on outreach or on serious discipleship? This girl's parents just want to know if the church will connect meaningfully enough with their daughter that she will navigate through the multiple voices pulling at her in a safe manner.

- You are a senior at college completing an honors degree in art history. You are reading postmodernism through Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. You have grown up in a Christian home. Your parents are now divorced and you live on your own. At church they are arguing about music, forms of baptism and who can be a member. There are so many worlds confronting you all at once. The one at church seems out-of-touch and trivial compared to the others.

Each of these stories happens every day in the life of a church leader. These are the manifestations of the larger world shattering forces remaking life for everyone in North America. This is how the Transition phase takes concrete form.

This **Transition** phase will last for some time to come. We now have to lead denominational systems and congregations on this journey from one world to another. We are being called upon to do this leading in a situation where the skills and established leadership models seem less and less able to empower us in this new time. What will enable those of us who are leaders to deal with these realities when we, ourselves, are struggling with our own roles in this new world? It is at this very important juncture that the concept of liminality provides us with a source of hope for the journey ahead. A phenomenon in such liminal times holds great promise for us if we will embrace it.

The Power of Communitas

THE OPPORTUNITY of our liminality is to recover our lost identity as God's transforming community in the midst of a culture that will always domesticate and accommodate the gospel to its own social ends. It is this element of becoming a distinct and peculiar people that must now possess the minds and hearts of God's people and their leaders. A missional encounter with North American culture presupposes the emergence of such a people and such leaders. In reality, we must reclaim the central

biblical notion of community without all of the confusion created by our sponsorship of the larger culture.

The appropriation of a missional identity for our churches is linked to the biblical accounting of the kingdom of God and the ways in which God covenants with people in order to call forth an alternative community of the kingdom. The language of an alternative people is problematic for many today because it seems to suggest, negatively, a sectarian identity for the church. This sense of separateness from the larger culture feels like an ill fit for our identity as God's people in North America. It is so far outside the social experience of the churches, that models of what that might look like in any positive way are absent. Behind this language, however, is the larger struggle now emerging in the American church. What is the identity of Christian life in a culture that has radically de-centered its relationship with Christianity, moving it and the church to the cultural margins? Rodney Clapp uses the metaphor of sponsorship to describe this struggle over identity.

Imagine a situation in which a nation chooses to have only one athletic shoemaker as its official sponsor. For a very long period of time that shoe manufacturer, such as Nike, assumes that role. A symbiosis, naturally, emerges between the culture and the shoemaker. The role of shoe salespeople becomes highly stylized and predictable. These shoe sellers have an honored place in the community. They are the sole distributors of a vital commodity in a society with a deep attachment to sports and athletic heroes. Over long years the Nike establishes training institutions to equip their employees for their role in the society. This sponsorship between the culture and the shoe manufacturer works relatively well for a considerable period of time. Then, one day, as the society reaches its zenith of power and prestige in the world, it informs the shoe manufacturer that its sponsorship is over (Clapp 1996, 17).

This is the desert island of liminality onto which we have been cast. One of the most striking factors in this loss of sponsorship is that all those who have been trained to function under the sponsorship, leaders, now find themselves in the strange place where there is a growing gap between their roles and the realities of their world. They are increasingly experiencing a disconnection between the expectations and perceptions they have been trained to assume and what is actually happening today. Whether pastor or denominational staff person, an increasing discontinuity exists between role perceptions and role expectations. In effect, the result of our liminal situation is that the roles with which we have operated as church leaders are no longer functional.

Using Clapp's metaphor, our sponsorship in the culture is over. Under the terms of this sponsorship, the church has been a central agent of socialization in North American culture. The church has been one of the most significant players in the process of socializing generations of people to the values of the dominant culture. It was at the heart of those values for a very long time. Church membership and good citizenship became synonymous during the period of sponsorship. What has been absent over this long period of time, to a large extent, has been the other element of the church's distinct identity—a peculiar people whose primary calling is to live as a witnessing community (1 Peter).

Victor Turner's model again provides helpful insights. He introduced the term *communitas* into his description of liminality. It is more than simply the Latin form of community. It points to a distinctive phenomenon that occurs when groups of people enter the liminal place of marginality. As such, the notion of *communitas* described by Victor Turner can be a vital image in helping leaders discover what it might mean for them to encounter a role that is radically different than sponsorship within the culture's values.

Turner observed that one result of having been thrust into a liminal place was the end of the old role identities and the leveling of hierarchies. Egalitarianism and comradeship replace professional stratification and specialized authority. In liminality, *communitas* is the potential for people to discover one another on a very different level of identity and role from the previous period of sponsorship.

Let us explore this further by trying to imagine what happens to people when all known forms begin to collapse or are simply removed. Titles no longer matter. Being CEO only matters where there is established formal and stable systems to administer. Likewise, household servants only have meaning, as such, when there are established households to manage and serve. When all such forms are stripped away, one is only left with people. The additional insight here is that such circumstances are generally provoked by a loss, leaving people in a mode of trying to find new ways to survive. Perhaps, a better way of describing this would be to seek ways to establish new forms, to bring order again out of the chaos of the liminal place. Under such circumstances, very real and vital community relationships may develop—relationships that may bear no resemblance to the formal structures that are swept away with the end of the former world. It is this process that Turner terms as the experience of *communitas*.

Now, how does this concept relate to the new place that church leadership finds itself in this time of Transition? Perhaps it would help for us to provide some description of what we see occurring across North America within churches and denominational systems. Using Turner's model, we could argue that church and denominational systems have entered the liminal place. Church leaders and denominational staff in judicatories, are being increasingly removed from the prior sets of roles, relationships and symbols of identity that prevailed in the period of sponsorship. In other words, what has been a normal network of roles, classifications and positions no longer holds.

We can see this happening by briefly commenting on some of the ways in which role identification tended to develop until relatively recently. Modern cultures define roles in terms of specialization and professionalism. We have seen this emerge within the church as, increasingly, the primary model for training its leaders has been based upon the professional schools. The church developed a model of training professionals and specialists. This continues into the present. The development of programs such as Clinical Pastoral Education, Doctor of Ministry programs, as well as various chaplaincy models, are all responses to the primary culture's demand for its leaders to be specialists and professionals. In recent times, the primary template for this specialized professional in ministry has shifted over from the doctor (professional healer), to the psychology departments (professional therapists and counselors), to the business schools (the manager and entrepreneur). Note the majority of resources and citations used by the Leadership Network. The point is that the primary metaphors for leadership in the church have been drawn from and shaped by the dominant culture's ethos. It would have been natural for the church, assuming its role of sponsorship within American culture, to have shaped its leaders to fit these paradigms. When the sponsorship ceases, however, and the church is being placed in a radically different social location vis-à-vis the culture, then these assumed classifications and roles will not sustain the life of the church in its new location. In liminality, these roles no longer function to shape the identity of the church as an alternative or missional community of the kingdom.

In this liminal place, however, the possibility for the experience of *communitas* emerges. While we observe the unraveling of our former systems, most of which were designed to serve the modern obsession to regulate through command and control systems, we also are presented with a great new possibility. We may find a renewed sense of common life together as missional communities, struggling to redefine our life and

work together increasingly without the encumbrances of the old sponsorship systems to support.

When this happens people discover one another at levels and in ways that could never have been anticipated. The potential for something radically new to emerge becomes real. There is tension in such a moment as this. In all the flux and stress of the liminal, leaders may turn again to the dominant culture for clues. The temptation is to look for new images of leadership from the culture that will legitimize their roles as sponsors and continue the illusion that all can be made well.

If leaders can look beyond this temptation, *communitas* offers the formation of a new kind of distinctive people, the constitution of a fresh vision for being the church. *Communitas* is the power of a people who now recognize that they are on the way to somewhere very different. We have spent our whole life supervising and strategizing for brick making in Egypt and we discover that there are neither the resources, nor the need, for brick making in the desert. Then the most creative way to lead people is by acknowledging that brick making competencies will not get us through the desert. In the desert a new set of competencies are necessary. What is needed is a willingness of leaders to become novices with and for one another.

Summary

STATED AS SIMPLY AS POSSIBLE, then, the current social location of the churches in North America presents its leadership with both a challenge and an opportunity to lead in a profoundly different manner.

The Challenge	The Opportunity
<p>To face the ways in which our roles are primarily accounts of our accommodation to the culture and being willing to let go of their power over us.</p>	<p>To reinvent leadership for our new setting.</p>
<p>To acknowledge that the orderly social worlds of our denominational and congregational systems are fundamentally reflections of cultural accommodation designed to control and prescribe how things ought to be under the regime of sponsorship.</p>	<p>For many of us, as leaders struggling in these systems, to confess that the emperor no longer has any clothes, that we can no longer function with a business as usual approach.</p>

We are in that moment when we might come together to dream outside the prescribed lines, learn to forget the roles we have received,

and risk developing the foresight to discover the new competencies we will need for this in-between time. What this requires is the emergence of leaders who will own the challenges and embrace the opportunities. This kind of space, this moment when we confess that many of the competencies we have learned are no longer adequate, when we acknowledge that we must become like novices all over again, like Crusoe on the island, this is *communitas*. It is probably the most powerful gift we can give to one another and our church systems at this moment in time.

Mary Jo Leddy uses the metaphor of reweaving the tapestry of religious life in North America. In her image, the threads of our roles and competencies under the auspices of a functional Christendom now lie on the floor in a tattered ball. They are threads and we, as leaders, are threadbare when we dare to admit this to ourselves. Our plans and strategies remain governed by that old world. Most of us are still trying to find a way of putting the tapestry back together again. But the opportunity that lies ahead of us is to take those tattered threads and dare to foresee a new time, with new roles; a new tapestry starting to be rewoven from the old. This will take a great deal of courage from those of us who are currently leading denominational systems. Courage is needed because the journey ahead is one with few maps, and we desperately want to have control over our future.

When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, his entire world of safety, control and identity was shattered. He had accommodated himself to a world that was never meant to be his destiny. He was told to face the greatest fear of his life. He was to return to Egypt and demand of the powerful empire that God's people be set free. The empire could no longer own the people of God. It was now time for that to end. Moses was profoundly shaken by God's request from him to return. He needed some form of security, some sign of control in order to show the tribes of slaves that he was not just standing before them with his own idea. He also wanted to have some control over the encounter with the empire. So Moses was direct. He asked for God's name. As we know, in that culture, to have a person's name was to have their power. What Moses asked for was not a matter of curiosity, it was an issue of power and control. God's response was an ambiguous one. The word to Moses was to tell the slaves that *ehyah asher ahyah* had sent him. Our normal translation of this compressed name is *I am who I am*. It remains ambiguous. It could mean that God was telling Moses that it was none of his business to figure out who God was, his business was to go and do as he was told.

Another way of translating this enigmatic name could also be *I shall be there, as there I shall be.*

There are two sides to this naming of God. On the one side is the covenantal promise of God that even in the most difficult and threatening of places, God will be present and this could be counted on. Even in the center of an empire that will no longer sponsor slaves, God will be present. *Make no mistake about that: I shall be there.* On the other side, God's name suggests that God will never be there as we might anticipate or wish God to be there. There is a reason for this. The future cannot be our future. The way forward cannot be an extension of our needs and our roles. The future is God's future and so God will be there as God will be there. *Communitas* is that place where the leaders no longer hold onto their roles, identities and needs to control, but they dare to be formed into a new journeying people by *I shall be there as there I shall be.*



Transition Themes in the Bible

WE HAVE FOCUSED on the nature of Transition and both the challenges and opportunities for Church leaders and their systems—local congregations or denominational agencies—in this phase. In this chapter we explore Biblical resources that provide ways of viewing the liminal experience. The intent is to gain insights from within our faith tradition about how those who have been in such places in the past have responded when confronted with such a challenge. Remember, earlier we insisted that within Transition, there are two seemingly paradoxical movements, a letting go of the old world and a re-entering of our traditions. The only way to let go is to re-enter our core stories. In this chapter, we shall re-enter some biblical stories that portray God's people in transition moments. Comfort and a reservoir of resources are available in these stories.

The Exodus

THE EXODUS PROVIDES one image of the Transition phase in the biblical material. From the time Jacob moved his clan under the protection of Joseph through to the hardship of slavery, the generations of Israel in Egypt had embedded an understanding of themselves. This understanding took generations to instill. The texts suggest a period of some three to four hundred years. By the time of Moses, these people, despite the depth of their suffering, had become thoroughly acculturated to their Egypt situation. One imagines that the stories of the Patriarchs were more like a distant and disconnected memory than any kind of empowering vision directing their lives. Egypt and slavery had become their normative ideology and a central feature of their self-identity. Because of this reality, the journey out of Egypt was by no means an easy movement. The texts which describe the early part of their desert experience present a

confused, frightened assortment of people living in the midst of terrifying fear precisely because the normative world of Egypt had been taken from them. Even though Egypt was the very world that was destroying them, they yearned for return to the security and habits of that known world. One of the primary reasons it took forty years for these offspring of Israel to enter a land that was little more than a month's journey by foot, was because they found it almost impossible to get four hundred years of Egypt out of their collective soul.

These desert wanderings have all the characteristics of a people working their way through the experience of liminality. Egypt was experienced as loss, ending and death. While from our perspective, this may be difficult to grasp, in reality, it was all they had known for generations. Within such a framework, it is hard to imagine anything else. Because of the fear, confusion and anger at this loss, Israel resisted the leadership of Moses all along the way. They consistently sought to reverse the direction of their journey. The slavery of a well-known and familiar Egypt was preferred to the ambiguous and unknown promise of a dream in the eyes of an old man. To a large extent, this was why it required the death of practically the entire generation of those who had left from Egypt before Israel was ready to follow Joshua into the land. There is ample evidence in biblical stories to suggest that the generations that have lived in and been shaped by long periods of stability, move with great difficulty into the Transition phase. This holds even if the period of stability meant slavery in the fleshpots of Egypt. For the people, it is a deep encounter with the liminal. Those who have been shaped by the stable periods seem incapable of constituting that group which participates in the reinvention of a new identity for their people. This, it would appear, comes from those generations that have grown up in the liminal experience. The desert shapes a people who have been disembedded, for whom Transition has become a normative way of life. These are the people who can anticipate and dream of the possibilities that the land of future promise holds.

The Exile

ANOTHER EXAMPLE of this Transition experience is found in those who were taken into exile after Nebuchadnezzar had laid waste Jerusalem in 587 BC. In Jeremiah, Ezra and Nehemiah, we find, again, a constellation of stories illustrating Transition or liminal living. Israel had lived in the land for a long period of time under the judges and kings. In this period, she experienced

both the power of empire under David and Solomon, and the accommodation of her desert covenant with God to the culture and gods of Canaan. Religious and political life had settled into a predictable pattern of responses to the Lord and alliances with the surrounding nations. Then suddenly, seemingly without warning in the minds of most, Judah was removed from Jerusalem into exile. This removal, the texts announce, was not caused by the geopolitical realities of armies and power, but by God.

Over the long years of assumed protection in the land, their assimilation and compromises to the cultural assumptions and religious powers of the surrounding peoples had hopelessly corrupted the life of the people of Israel. The covenant relationship, expressed in festivals, worship days and great feasts, had been emptied of their contextual realities in the great acts of God's deliverance and promise. Instead, these festivals, feasts and rituals had become functions disconnected from the framing stories. They were, by the time of Jeremiah, external habits, a means of satisfying requirements. Priests and court prophets became primarily like regulatory agencies whose roles were to ensure that the system's functions were maintained in appropriate ways. Right performance displaced a life of covenant faithfulness.

While the exile affected only a small percentage of Judah's population, its impact was felt as a profound assault on the central assumptions of the people. For Israel, this event was beyond all their categories of identity as a people, and all their theological frameworks about the nature of God. Nothing within this long period of accommodation within the land had prepared them for exile. This is why Jeremiah's warnings and gross visual representations of what was to come fell on deaf ears. It was simply beyond the framework within which almost all of Israel lived. This framework assumed that a proper regulation of the days, festivals and priestly orders established the covenant promise of continued protection on God's part and complete security in the land they had been given. In texts like Psalm 137 one encounters the unadorned expressions of confusion, anger and bitterness of a people dislocated to a totally unexpected liminal setting. The language betrays all the characteristics of a people lashing out blindly, looking for scapegoats and searching with desperation for any hope that would get them quickly back to Jerusalem and the world that had been ripped from them. There is no sense in these texts that the people felt that the way of God could be located in the place of exile. It is the prophet at the margins, like Jeremiah, and the prophet of the exile experience, like Isaiah, who would continually

articulate that hope would be found in the very place where everything seemed to scream the absence and abandonment of God.

What these texts tell us, again, is that only the people who dwell in the land of darkness (a powerful image for liminality used by Isaiah and recalled by us every advent season) can hope to see the light of God's future. Those who continue to long for the old empire of Jerusalem and the former ritual regulations cannot hope to see God's future. In Old Testament books like Jeremiah and Ezra-Nehemiah, the underlying implication of exile is that it would take at least seventy years in Babylon to get the old forms of Jerusalem life out of their souls and get very different people ready to return to the city. Once more, we see that the impetus for the massive reform and renewal that would literally reinvent Israel from the ground up, would come not from those taken from the land, but their offspring. It would not come from those who left a decimated Jerusalem, but the young who had never known the pre-liminal Jerusalem world except in story (Akenson, 1998).

These were the young who had imbibed deeply the culture of Babylon. They had been educated and trained in this strange, alien world. At the same time, they had learned and recovered the story of their covenant God so that they were able to lead to re-forming of life in Jerusalem. What happens in Babylon is something that could never have occurred in the regulatory assumptions and among the priestly class in empire-shaped Jerusalem. What the exiles achieved in the seventy odd years of their terrible separation was nothing less than the re-framing of the dominant story of God's relationship with Israel and their understanding of the Covenant that defined that relationship. The Old Testament is, quite literally, re-written from the perspective of exile in Babylon. The religious leaders who returned to Jerusalem after 538 were not the same as those who had been taken away in 587. A generation of leaders had to die and a new one emerge in order for the reinvention of covenant life.

The new leaders did not discard the stories of God's dealings with Israel, the historical memory was preserved, but it was filtered through the Babylonian experience. What came back to Jerusalem with the returning exiles was a thorough re-working of the texts and the stories, a Babylonian re-working. These leaders and theologians had read the story all over again through very different eyes. They returned with a new vision of the future that saw all of creation and all of history shaped around the triumph of God's kingdom through a covenant people. These were a

newly invented people shaped by a newly understood Scripture. The life and faith of Israel shifted dramatically because of the exile experience. Transition and liminality were the essential forms in which this process took place. These exile leaders did not make up their own stories or myths. The reinventing was not like that at all. What is meant by reinvention is the process whereby these leaders and theologians were compelled to re-think and re-imagine the meaning of their original primary stories in the light of exile. In many ways this was a profoundly faithful, orthodox act that regarded the Scriptures as sacred gifts that could not simply become texts in some postmodern sense. These leaders were essentially conservatives. They were bound to the tradition. They did not recover the tradition from the perspective of empire and Jerusalem, but from the liminal identity of exile. This is what made them radical; it was the reality of their location outside ascendancy and empire. From the margins, after seventy years of painful theological work, there came the reformulation of Israel.

Each of the illustrations used in this section was of a fulcrum turning order. Each took at least two generations before the transition from the loss of the older, stability phase to the recovery of core values and new systems was completed. The implications of this time span raise important questions about the nature of leadership. How will a leader sustain a life of vision, energy and encouragement through these kinds of long-term transitions? More will be said about that important question after we have outlined some of the necessary elements for leading people through the Transition. First, let us turn to the New Testament for additional resources.

When turning to the New Testament, we are, again, faced with people being shifted out of long established assumptions about their world and the ways that God works, into liminal, Transition contexts. In a review of the life and ministries of both Peter and Paul, we find clear examples of this.

The Apostle Paul

SOMEONE AS BRILLIANT as a Saul of Tarsus, educated in the elite schools, a cross-cultural Jew at home in the cosmopolitan world of the Roman Empire, could not perceive who Jesus was. Saul of Tarsus had a zeal for God that outran his contemporaries. He explicitly declared in his letter to the Galatians: ... *I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my kinsmen, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers* (Galatians 1:14). The long-established frameworks of post-exilic Judaism were so powerfully embedded in Saul, as in Peter, that they had become

the normative tradition. The intent of Saul, as a Jewish leader zealous for God, and many like him, was to regulate and maintain the system. They did so brilliantly as those who faithfully managed within the life of Israel so that piety, tradition, and love of Torah shaped the people. This love of God and Torah made Saul a man who was passionate to regulate all of Jewish life so that syncretism, the encroachments of pagan life, and disloyalty to Torah were eliminated. This is what drove him to stamp out the new movement of Jesus' followers. Saul was prepared to use all the means at his disposal to obtain the righteousness of Israel and hasten the day of the Lord. Because of this conviction, shaped by the tradition, Saul was unprepared for the actions of God in Jesus.

The Apostle Peter

PETER'S LIFE, prior to the resurrection, had been lived deeply within a framework that predetermined what he would hear and how he would respond to Jesus. Peter was shaped by a set of assumptions about who God was, what it meant to be the people of God, and who belonged to that people. He had a clear and passionate view of what God's kingdom would be like. So embedded was this picture in Peter's mind that he was prepared to set Jesus straight in his thinking and legislate by the sword the nature of the kingdom Jesus announced. Such actions were not a result of Peter's obscurantism, or intellectual incapacity. He represented the way a majority in Israel framed their world. Peter filtered the words and actions of Jesus through a framework shaped over hundreds of years.

Following the resurrection, Peter's own encounter with the forces of Transition are detailed in the early chapters of Acts where questions about the relationship between Judaism and the Gospel are being worked out. One assumes that by the time Luke composed this narrative, Jewish Christianity was largely a spent force and a receding memory. This fact, in itself, would have required some explanation. What had happened to that group among whom the Gospel had originated? How had the good news of Jesus, a Jew who came from God as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, become disembedded so quickly from its origins? All of this needed explanation, especially to a Gentile Christian audience who must have felt confused and off balance by all these unexpected turn of events.

Luke wrote his two-volume account, in part, to address these immediate and disquieting questions. In Acts 10, Peter went from Joppa to Caesarea, to visit Cornelius, a Roman Centurion and a devout, God-

fearing man. At this point in Luke's narrative, Peter has been at the center of amazing events. He was called to Joppa where a disciple named Tabitha (Dorcas), loved for the ways she did good and looked after the poor, became ill and died. The summons to Peter was an emergency call to come at once. This text clearly infers the expectation that Peter had the authority to raise her from the dead. This is, in fact, what took place. The result was the conversion of many in that city. Prior to being called to Caesarea, Peter was continuously involved in a vital, dynamic movement of God's Spirit that must have been shifting many of his categories about the nature and purpose of Jesus' resurrection. Yet, equally important is that all of this dynamic movement—that must have caused a tremendous stir within the Jewish communities, confirming for many the rightness of their identity and the blessing of God on their lives—was being carried out almost solely within the parameters of Jewish life. This is clearly evident in Acts 11:19. Those who were scattered by the persecution following Stephen's stoning were limiting their proclamation of the gospel only to Jews. In other words, for Peter, as for most of the converts, the Gospel remained embedded within the long held frameworks of Judaism. What God had come to redeem in Jesus and the kingdom Jesus announced, remained fixed within the understanding of a religio-political renewal of Israel centered in a revitalized Jerusalem.

In Acts 10, Peter was disembedded from this framework. The energy, celebration and profound joy of experiencing all God had promised coming to fruition within the framework of his expectations was shattered. This was about liminality and Transition. This was born out by Peter's vision of the large sheet filled with clean and unclean animals. The implication of the dream was that he was being pushed outside the boundaries and categories of his known world. It is not difficult to imagine that one of Luke's purposes in recounting this story was to show the troubled and struggling Gentile Christians that the gospel announced in Jesus would break boundaries. Its force was to cross the traditional frameworks of a stable world and turn those worlds upside down. How else could the fact of Jewish rejection and the destruction of Jerusalem be explained?

Luke's emphasis on this text about the clean and unclean animals was not primarily on the vision itself as some manifestation of God's power. Nor was it about the nature of the Spirit who gives gifts and spiritual abilities to the emerging church. What these texts are unfolding is that people may have all kinds of charismatic experiences, and at the same time,

continue to function within structures and frameworks that are themselves impediments to the movement of the Gospel. Peter's vision on the roof top was far more about the way in which God's Spirit confronts a religiously constructed world whose regulatory practices and functions have become obstacles to encountering the Gospel. This world must be broken even as people, like Peter, remain fundamentally opposed to that challenge because they are so deeply embedded in the stability and normalcy of their constructed world.

In this particular story, Peter was pushed into dealing with his boundaries. What are the categories of identity in the new creation called into being by the resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit? Standing before Cornelius, Peter's inherited construction of those categories was immediately shattered. Even though Peter had witnessed God raise the dead and free him from certain death, Peter struggled for words in responding to Cornelius. While tentatively beginning his response, the situation passed out of Peter's control. The Holy Spirit broke the boundaries that controlled his world, and into the conversation caused Cornelius, the Roman, to express the manifestations of the Spirit that had been seen only among Jewish converts. The response was that of astonishment. Peter's world was being shattered. Here was a Gentile being accepted into Christian identity without the need for circumcision. Further, Peter could not have missed the meaning of the Spirit's descent upon Cornelius. This was described in the terms of a second Pentecost. This story is not only about the conversion of Cornelius, the Gentile; but also about the conversion of Peter, the Jew. All Peter could do was acknowledge the facts and humbly receive what God has done. But what the story makes clear "is that mission changes not only the world but also the church. Quite plainly in this case there is a conversion of the church as well as the conversion of Cornelius. Mission is not just church extension. It is something more costly and more revolutionary. It is the action of the Holy Spirit, who...leads the church toward the fullness of the truth that it has not yet grasped" (Newbigin 1995, 59).

The result of this story of Peter being disembedded from his Jewish boundaries was that the Church itself had become a different kind of society, one that could not have been imagined by any in the circle of the disciples. Prior to Cornelius, the church had been a society embedded within the cultural world of Israel. Now it would become something radically different. This was to be a very painful Transition. It would cost Peter his life and end, even up to this moment in time, the embracing of

the Gospel by God's chosen people. We cannot overstate the depth of liminality and Transition that are expressed in these texts. Here we are witnessing the young church struggling with the most difficult and deeply felt boundary issues. We, in North America, at the end of this millennium, are struggling with no less significant issues. Our time is also one of Transition and liminality.

The Cornelius encounter was certainly a liminal, Transition experience for Peter. Even the powerful, external impetus of the Spirit's coming upon those Gentile Romans who heard the message was not sufficient for Peter to completely embrace that fundamental restructuring of his frameworks as a Jew. The implications of the Jerusalem Council indicate the massive nature of this struggle. Peter's own conflicted encounter with Paul over eating with non-Jews at Antioch strongly indicates a powerful underlying struggle with that earlier world of Jewish exclusivism (Galatians 2:11-21). While Peter may have worked out in his mind a new set of categories that broke the boundaries, in his own living he continued to struggle with how to put that reality into practice. This struggle would be played out not only in Peter, but also across the Jewish-Christian communities. It would result in the separation of Judaism from the Gospel of Jesus, in large part because Judaism had reduced the central symbols of covenant life to regulatory formulas for controlling the identity of the community. Circumcision, originally a symbol of the costly and distinctive identity of a people chosen and shaped for the life of the world, had become a means of regulating the normative activity and identity of membership. A whole edifice had been built up to mark off Jewish identity. It had become an end in itself, far removed from the original vision. The outpouring of the Spirit, the formation of communities house-to-house where people's social and economic needs were met—these things did not challenge or subvert the essential structures and normative regulations of Judaism. Some thought the revolution of Jesus could be contained within the old order even when the dead were raised and the prisons opened; but, the moment a non-Jew experienced the life of Jesus in the Spirit, a whole world collapsed for those first Christians.

Many would be unable to negotiate this transition. Judaism would recoil. A church that was never expected would be born. Liminality in all its elements would be tasted with accompanying confusion and anger. The desire was to push everything back into the regulatory categories of Judaism, to make some kind of compromise that would maintain the integrity of the older structures. Tensions and conflicts around letting go

of regulations and reaching forward to a new, uncharted world of Gentile Christianity persisted. At some levels, even the writing of Luke-Acts is an illustration of a liminal, Transition document. By the time Luke wrote this account, the church had become almost entirely Gentile in character. There was a need to explain how this transition had occurred. All promise and expectation seemed to point in the direction of a new Israel around a reigning Jerusalem. Israel had rejected the church and the Romans had laid waste Jerusalem. The initial paradigms had unraveled. How would God's actions be explained in the light of this unexpected disembedding? Transition and liminality are the only places where these questions can be rightly asked and appropriately answered.



Transition, Change and Culture

THE CHANGE MODEL DEVELOPED in this book needs to be related to a larger discussion of culture. Our purpose is to enable leaders to relate the dynamics of change within their church or denominational systems to this other dynamic of culture. What we will discover is that change at all levels is expressed and worked out through the matrix of one's cultural frameworks. Some of the reasons why it is so difficult to engage in effective change is because leaders often fail to reflect on the dynamics of culture that are continually operating beneath the surface. This chapter will relate the dynamics of change to the dynamics of cultural formation in our lives.

The Meaning of Culture

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND how a culture forms and affects people and organizations in order to see how both—people and organizations—respond to the change model outlined in the previous chapters. When systems find themselves in the midst of Disembedding and Transition, resistance is predictable and inevitable. Almost all of us resist change that we don't like and for a good reason. Change always requires the loss of something deeply important to us. It is natural to resist that which upsets the rituals and patterns of our lives. The explanation of this resistance is the powerful shaping effect of **culture**. The social sciences provide a rich resource for understanding this complex idea of culture. Our purpose here is to outline a model showing how leadership and change are directly related to this idea of culture.

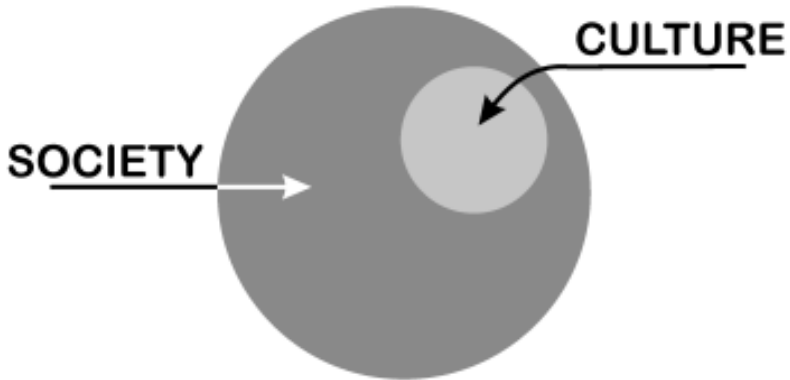
First, we need to distinguish between two separate but related terms: **culture** and **society**. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz observed that one of the most significant facts (about human beings) may be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of lives but in the end live only one (Geertz 1973, 450). Why is this so? Geertz' answer

is **culture** which he defines as: “an inherited system of symbolic forms that operates as a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions—for governing behavior” (44).

Paul Hiebert defines culture as the “more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings and values and their associated patterns of learned behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel and do” (Hiebert 1985, 30). Hiebert emphasizes the three elements of ideas, feelings and values as a way of understanding the nature of culture and how it works in our lives. Each represents three dimensions of culture: the cognitive (ideas), the affective (feelings), and the evaluative (values).

Ideas, feelings and values are the three basic dimensions of culture. Culture expresses itself in behaviors and products and these are the visible forms of the ideas, feelings and values mentioned above. This integrated system causes us to live by a certain kind of worldview or core of meaning. Hiebert’s model identifies two primary levels at which culture operates: the surface traits and the core traits. Culture is that set of core values, that silent language, which shapes our perception and understanding of the world. Culture gives us a framework for reading the world. It provides us with a set of clear feelings and meanings about life through the operation of symbols, stories and rituals. It is these deeply embedded core values within us that determine and shape the surface level systems of our **social** relationships with others.

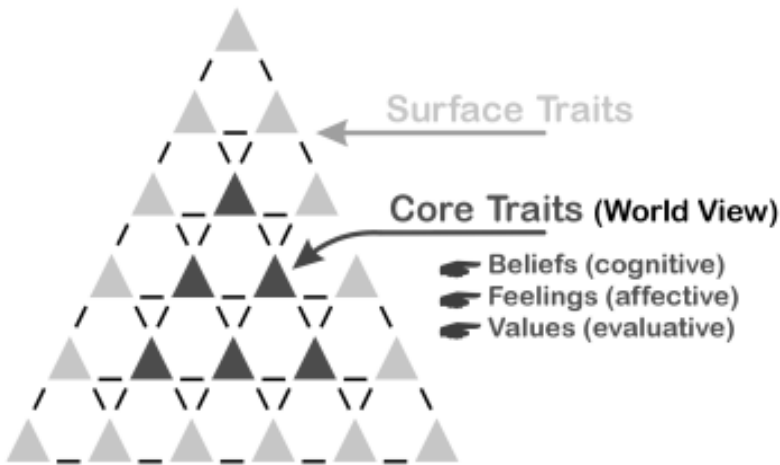
Society is comprised of the interactions that occur at the conscious level of our lives. When someone is traveling abroad, for example, and sees his nation’s flag flying outside a building, this symbol evokes a wide range of emotional responses that come from values and beliefs that lie unconscious, deep within the individual. The flag is an external, surface, social symbol for deeply held core cultural values. Obviously, society and culture interact with one another. The primary relationship moves from culture out toward society; the former generates and shapes the latter. All of our social interactions with one another—the things that happen in society, that get reported in the daily news or in glossy magazines about personalities and events, popular culture—are the rich variety of ways we respond as a society to the cultural forces shaping our collective lives. The following simple diagram illustrates this relationship between culture and society.



At the outer surface of the circle is society. It is the level we are most familiar with, and consciously interact with, all the time. Society is related to culture much in the same way that the earth's crust is related to its core. We buzz about our lives at the surface level, sustained by the hot core that we do not see, and to which we rarely give any thought. The relationship between society and culture works in the same way.

At the society level are social institutions, such as denominations, congregations, political systems, schools, economic systems, arts, polls, trends and so forth. Popular culture is the description of what is going on in these areas—the new, the traditional, and the trends. People like Faith Popcorn and George Barna research and communicate about the changes that occur at this level. The Leadership Network sends out NetFaxes reporting on social trends at this level. The Yankelovich Partners recently produced a book entitled *Rocking The Ages* that captures a snap shot of the society and its generational cohorts at a specific point in American life. These are all examples of how we function. We report about the surface trait realities of society. If we assume that the real dynamics of change occur simply at this level, then we will miss the most powerful dynamics of change. These are going on at the more foundational or subterranean levels of culture.

Hiebert extends his model of culture to present this distinction between society and culture in the following way.



In Hiebert's diagram, **surface traits** represent what we actually see and experience going on in society. This is the level of trends, statistics, habits, the kind of events reported on the news, the visible artifacts of a society, like flags, art and so forth. Beneath this surface level lie the espoused values of a society. These are values and frameworks to which people are verbally and emotionally committed. At the deep center are the **core traits (worldview)** which drive and make a culture. These are the mental and emotional models that frame our lives. As change moves a group further away from the stable phase, the core traits, or mental frameworks, which have been formed into a culture, and by which people have come to live, are being increasingly eroded. The external environment becomes less and less congruent with the inside organizational culture of the group or system. In this situation, leaders cannot afford to function as if the assumptions of the stability phase are still appropriate. If they choose to remain embedded within the cultural assumptions of the stable period, then their basic responses will tell them that all they need to do is continue to manage the system and all will eventually turn out well.

Disembedding Culture

IN THE DISEMBEDDING and Transition phases, the core traits of a culture (either that of a large culture such as Western culture, or an organizational

culture such as a denominational system) are shifting and moving. This is why we use the language of disembedding, because that is precisely what is occurring. In this kind of context, leaders require the skills that will help them understand the **what, why and how** of core trait transformation. This has to do with culture. This is not what has come to be known as *popular culture* that refers to surface level indicators. These indicators are important, but not sufficient in these phases of change. Without skills of listening to and understanding what is happening at the deeper level of core traits, leaders will tend to misinterpret, or misrepresent, the meaning of the surface phenomenon. They will also continue to assume that their role remains the same as it has always been—managing the organization within the paradigm of their older world. This is the current danger and difficulty being experienced by many pastors and denominational leaders. They are either trying to cope with the stress and flux in church life by managing out of their past skills, or they are shaping their responses to the context on the basis of trends and popular culture—the surface traits. In each case, these leaders are failing to connect with the deeper levels of cultural change. This is why so many change strategies fail to significantly transform the system. Powerful core cultural elements within any organization will continually derail strategic plans based upon surface traits. Leaders must understand the relationship between leadership and culture.

We all have strong commitments to those core traits that have framed our lives. Both as individuals and members of organizations, culture not only shapes the way we function, it also calls from us powerful commitments to its particular framework. Whether the American way of life, or the denominational world we have inhabited for a very long time, our commitments are deep. It is not only culture that shapes us, however, we also shape the culture of our organizations. This is not a passive, one-way-street in which everything happens to us. On the contrary, we also shape and manage the culture in which we are embedded. In our roles as leaders, we are also responsible for developing, managing, changing and sustaining our cultures. Leadership is doing this all the time. The issues are whether we become conscious of this process in ourselves. Can we learn to step outside our culture in order to see it from another angle? Will we become protectors of the current cultural frameworks of the organization? Will we initiate a transformation process that fundamentally reinvents the culture for a very different world? These are key questions of leadership. This is why leaders must come to terms with the issues of culture and change.

We should make no mistake about the fact that those organizational

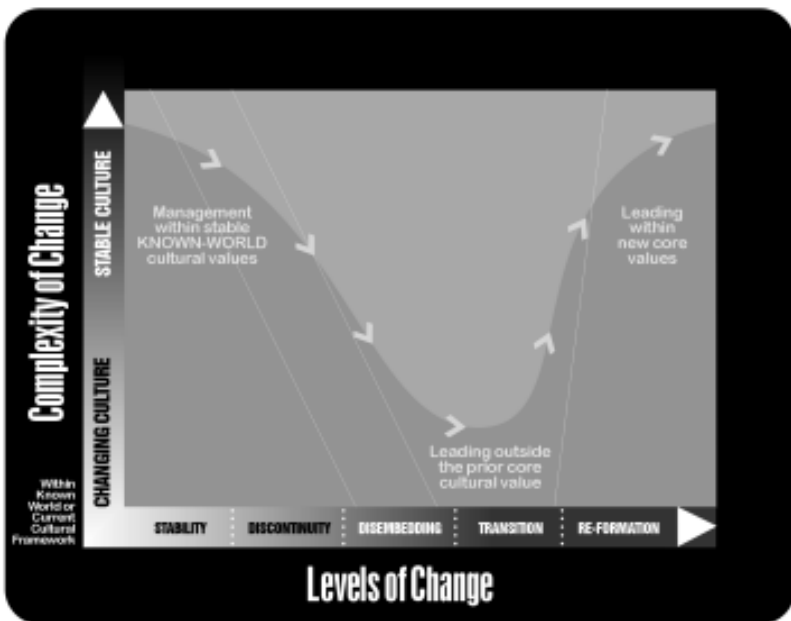
cultures we have grown up in and worked within for a long period of time have become the way in which we read ourselves in terms of identity and our world. This organizational culture gradually becomes the shared assumption of the group. They soon become the accepted, unquestioned ways in which we frame our world, the largely unconscious elements of our lives. Such core traits are assumed, but we see the world through them. A simple example from everyday life will make the point. Consider a simple pair of glasses. Unless an intentional effort is made to see glasses, one is hardly ever aware of seeing through them; and yet, they are essential for functioning in the world. In a similar way, culture is the way we see through into the world and make sense of it for ourselves as a group. As Clifford Geertz wrote when describing this phenomenon of culture: “the most difficult thing for a fish to grasp, if a fish could think, is that it is swimming in an ocean of water, because water is the very environment in which it lives. Similarly, culture is for us what an ocean is for fish. Our organizational cultures are to us, what an ocean is to a fish” (Geertz 1973).

In our own time, culture is working at several levels simultaneously. First, the core traits that formed the culture of North America are in the process of radical transformation and disembedding. Not only are they being uprooted, these core values are now in competition with core traits that have arrived from all parts of the world as a multi-cultural society emerges on this continent. Second, the particular culture that formed the inner life of Christian identity is also being challenged and uprooted precisely on account of the larger cultural shifts, the disembedding of Christian life from its former role of prime sponsor of the larger culture. While these two movements are inter-connected, it is helpful to see them as distinctive movements for the sake of discussion. Congregations and denominations have, over a period of several hundred years, built up a series of core traits that define how they see themselves and the context about them. In general, these core traits were formed through the long phase of stability and tradition. It is precisely these core traits that have been rapidly disembedded over the last half of the 20th century.

In the Stability Phase and the Discontinuity Phase, almost all the change is taking place at the surface or societal level. These changes are within the operative core traits of the culture that is, itself, assumed and not seen as changing. This is manageable, gradual change, within the stable, ongoing world of *Father Knows Best*, or the ideal world of the 50's portrayed in the movie *Pleasantville*. Continuing, then, once change moves consistently into the Disembedding Phase and the Transition Phase, it is

occurring at levels far deeper than the societal surface with its trends and statistics. In these latter phases, it is the core traits themselves that are changing. Basic, long-held, tacit assumptions, frameworks and values of an organization are being challenged, eroded and transformed.

The following diagram presents a simple overview of the dynamic interaction between the five phases of change and their relationship with both society and culture. What should be noted is the developing levels of complexity that emerge as the change process moves forward. In the stable phase, dealing with change is not a particularly complex set of skills. In fact, the process of change is basically learning from a mentor who has developed, through long years of experience, the skills for understanding the traditions and shaping of the organization. People who have a deep awareness of, and loyalty to, the social contract of a time or organization best shape this kind of change process. The best leaders in this phase are those with a somewhat aristocratic grasp of how things are done and the social rituals for making decisions. When the change process moves into Disembedding and Transition phases, however, it is precisely those skills which should not be directing the processes of change within the organization. Something radically different is required.



Church Systems as Organizational Cultures

THIS CONVERSATION NOW NEEDS to be applied to the organizational culture in which most of us have grown up and in which we are responsible for giving leadership. This is the denominational system. It is a culture that has shaped us, and that we shape, by virtue of our long-term immersion in its life. Denominational systems are organizational cultures and must be understood as such if we are going to lead them appropriately through this process of Transition. The reality is that most of those who lead within denominational systems have been involved in them for a very long time. Their culture is deeply embedded in those who are leaders. All that has been said to this point in terms of change, liminality and transition depends upon these leaders understanding the dynamics of the denomination as an organizational system. Furthermore, these systems are inherently conservative by nature. They are designed to preserve and conserve tradition. They are deeply resistant to change and reward leaders who best represent the core values of the denominational culture. For many of these organizational cultures, their roots go deeply into the organizational formations of the Reformation and the sponsorship roles of a functional Christendom in North America. These are massive issues of culture and leadership when it comes to addressing the organizational culture of denominations. In reality, this is also true in those particular expressions of the denominations, the local congregation.

Any culture both develops and manages itself in two directions. In one direction, it is continually developing systems that enable it to adapt and survive in relation to its external environment. Again, that is going to look different depending upon the phase of change in which the organization is operating. Thus, for denominational organizations, shaped for those very long periods of time in the relative stability of a functional Christendom, its adaptation and survival processes would be relatively minimal. By and large, it would be successive accommodations to the perceived Christian culture. Adaptation to that external environment would have been developmental, within the shared assumptions of the organizational culture's traditions and values. Again, these sorts of changes occur at the surface trait level. When the phase of change moves into disembedding and transition, however, then the adaptation needs to become something radically other than developmental and minimal accommodation. This leads to the second direction in which a culture develops and manages itself.

In the second direction, the organizational culture is continually integrating its internal systems to make sure that the assumed culture survives and continues. This is done in a variety of ways. Edgar H. Schein summarizes six processes by which a group will manage the internal integration to develop and maintain its identity (Schein 1992, 70-92). These are summarized as follows:

1. Creating a common language and conceptual categories

The organization forms its own inner language through which to communicate its values, ideas and feelings. Its culture is formed, developed and sustained as leaders and members take on the language peculiar to its life. Denominational systems do this often through the use of certain theological language. I come out of a Baptist tradition, but in the course of my work, meet regularly with leaders from the Reformed tradition. The depth of in-house language among Reformed people identifies them as a group, and distinguishes me as an outsider. Baptists are no different. Denominational leadership maintains a short hand developed to communicate efficiently with one another. In my tradition, I found that all groups within the denomination were identified by letters that everyone in the system understood, but were a barrier to anyone outside the culture. Within Mike's Reformed tradition, the same exists; for example, a Presbyterian understands Paul's admonition to "do everything decently and in order" differently than many other Christians.

2. Defining group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion

Every group defines itself by identifying who is in and who is out. This is the issue of membership. During the long Christendom phase of stability, this boundary issue was a relatively simple question for denominations. For Baptists it was obvious. Believer's baptism, by immersion, granted membership and inclusion. For Presbyterians, membership meant having passed through some form of membership class or catechism followed by vows and confirmation.

3. Distributing power and status

All organizations, including denominations, must work out the criteria for members to gain or lose power, and what power looks like. For some traditions, access to power is fairly simple. For others, the hoops through which one must pass can be daunting. In his early years of ministry, Mike served as Singles pastor in a non-denominational church. To become

a pastor, in this tradition, one simply needed a commitment to God and some manner of faithful and effective ministry. Local Elders could lay the mantle of pastor on one as they saw fit. When Mike decided to join the Presbyterian Church, he found the prior mantle removed and a fairly daunting task before him to gain proper accreditation.

4. Developing norms of intimacy, friendship, and love

Organizations must work out the rules of peer relationships. Sharing and openness do not happen by chance, they are a function of carefully worked out, unspoken codes. It is ironic that of the thousands of churches Percept has surveyed, all consider themselves “warm and friendly.” Upon closer analysis and longer involvement, however, that warm façade begins to dissolve. We are convinced that what is often under the surface is a set of conventions the church has developed for sharing its life together. Those newer to the church are simply uninformed, and therefore, do not know how to play according to the rules.

5. Defining and allocating rewards and punishments

What are the behaviors that get rewarded? What are the sinful acts that get punished? Who are the heroes of the organization, those held up as paradigms of leadership and representatives of the values and ethos of the denomination? What does this say about the core assumptions of the organization? Who are villains, those leaders pushed out to the margins and not talked about within the denomination? What do these people say about the core assumptions and boundaries of the organization?

6. Explaining the unexplainable—ideology and religion

Every group faces unexplainable events that must be given meaning, so that those in the organization are able to integrate the events in a way that doesn't call the group's identity or assumptions into question. This feature is what Peter Berger would refer to as a prevailing plausibility structure. Schein's point is that every organizational culture will develop these processes as a means of integrating its own core assumptions deeply into its life and ensuring itself the capacity to survive in the world (70-71). Again, these mechanisms will operate developmentally and without a great deal of discontinuity between the internal and external worlds during those long periods of stability. However, these natural internal mechanisms can become highly problematic to the organization when they are operating in ways that uncritically continue its cultural assumptions in

a period of disembedding and Transition.

Mechanisms of cultural embedding are normally unquestioned and operate outside the awareness of those in the organization. These mechanisms are usually never confronted or debated so that they control the organization's responses to change in ways that those in the organization will not see or understand. What this means is that without the ability of leaders to continually step outside their own cultural assumptions within the organization, they will continually respond to the Transition level of change with the conserving cultural assumptions of the stable period in which they have been shaped. This is precisely what is happening within many denominational systems as leaders seek to address and cope with the massive amounts of change happening in the larger culture and impacting denominational systems. The internal mechanisms for integration and continuity are very strong, and remain powerfully embedded in the ethos and values of the previous stability phase of a sponsoring functional Christendom. Consequently, denominational leadership, to a large extent, approaches the Transition reality of their churches from within the boundaries of its known world and frameworks.

Pressures to leave the old culture of denominational Christendom intact are great. Consequently, a gap exists between the old culture and the present world of Transition. Yet this new world we have entered requires a whole new organizational culture in order to reinvent the structures and forms of Christian life in North America. Hence, the primary challenge of denominational leadership at this crucial juncture for Christian identity and witness in North America is this. How do we deconstruct—take apart and understand—our assumed culture? This must be done before the critical move can be made to recreate the church for its missional engagement with a whole new kind of North American culture.

The challenge is for denominations and their leaders to re-conceive themselves and reinvent their systems from the ground up. How will leaders get outside their passing worlds and organizational cultures in order to think about a different future? This implies far more than just rethinking the particular denominational system of any specific group. It involves a rethinking of the entire culture and frameworks of congregational and denominational life. As we said earlier, we will not be able to convert our churches for a missional engagement with our culture without first addressing these critical issues. These are precisely the challenges and questions that any group faced by a liminal context must ask. They are the questions that must probe beyond the period of denial,

anger and the desire to make the old-world work one more time.

These are massive challenges for leaders of congregations and denominations. We address here, the fuller implications of the fulcrum shifting changes discussed thus far in this book. We have been thrust into a world for which we are ill prepared. This is the world we must address if the missional engagement with our culture is to emerge from those systems and structures of church life that have formed North America over much of this century. An engagement will occur. There will be a generation of leaders who have lived through the liminality of exile and marginalization and who will shape a new future for the church. That leadership does not have to emerge from the current structures of denominational life in North America. God is not bound to those structures, but will use all those who risk the journey into unmapped worlds. Douglas John Hall expressed the moment of challenge that now faces denominational cultures with these words: “I believe that commitment to the established institutional model of the church—to Christendom in its various institutional forms—is the single most important cause of inertia and the retardation of the intentional and creative response to this great transition” (Hall 1997, 7).

Nicholas Lemann, national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly* wrote an article in *The New York Times Magazine* in which he characterized a *New American Consensus* (November 1, 1998). Using the remarks of Richard Wirthlin, the article states: “Americans are seeking reassurance on their own peace of mind and personal security. One of the most dominant values is: *I want to feel secure*. I want to feel that what I have will endure. That’s what we picked up, about, I’d say, three years ago. These values don’t change very quickly. They move fairly slowly. The fact that it has emerged is significant” (41). Lemann argues that one cannot dismiss this new consensus as temporary. It is an important change in American outlook. The traditional view of a citizen with larger values of loyalty, trusting their social institutions (surface level organizations which indicate core values), using their resources for the public good, doesn’t apply to America today (68). A national commitment does not exist beyond the resolve for self-protection and the sense of distrust toward all institutions. We are witnessing a kind of privatism that excludes and denigrates the public sphere. Widespread indifference, anxiety and self-protection are the most distinctive phenomena of the present day. People are feeling so disembedded from so much of their previous expectations of core values that this loss of balance and stability is creating its own reactions right

across our society. People are feeling wounded and fragile. They are turning ever further in upon themselves.

Sociologist, Richard Sennett recently published a book, *The Corrosion of Character* (1998). He argues that the massive, wrenching changes of this century have had profound consequences for people in the work force of North America that will significantly shape the nature of our culture well into the next century. In part of his book he reports on the work life of people in a Boston bakery over a twenty-five year period. At the beginning of that period the bakery was operated by a group of sweaty, somewhat grumpy Greek-Americans. What characterized these men was their loyalty to the bakery and their pride of work. These were people invested in their communities. Twenty-five years later, all of that has disappeared. Machines that do most of the work have replaced the workers. Transient workers who spend a few months on the job and then move on now operate the machines. They are not bakers, and they have no sense of belonging and have no idea where they will be or what they will be doing in twelve months. These people are indifferent and uninvested in what is happening either in the bakery or its neighborhood.

At the other end of the scale, Sennett describes the lives of former IBM executives who were downsized out of their high paying jobs. This downsizing hit them like an earthquake, a familiar experience for the many management personnel who are experiencing similar events in their lives. By Sennett's account, these people have accepted their fate and they have turned inward. Their energy is expended in self-awareness and they have lost interest in civic affairs. These are radically different North America core values than those that drove this culture less than half a century ago. Something significant has shifted. This is a new kind of consensus with profound implications for everyone leading our churches. What we are encountering in these kinds of changes are the **responses** of people trying to deal with the disembedding and in-between phases of transformation with the culture. These two reports from the front of American cultural transformation are but small illustrations of the world that has changed dramatically for all of us. Denominational organizations and their leaders live in the heart of this Transition. What is now required is a fundamental reinventing of both.

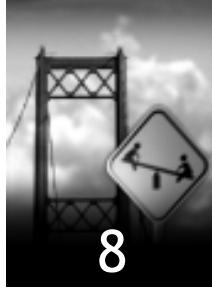
In *Death of the Church*, we discussed the rhythmic pattern of the generational cycle. Within that theory, there is a period of fragmentation and unraveling. We find it curious that we are in that phase of the cycle at the same moment that a larger social and cultural transformation is

occurring. How these two phenomena are interacting is a subject of interest, but beyond the scope of our purposes here. What is clear, however, is that to the extent there is a rhythmic pattern, there will be a turning point. Society can not unravel forever. Something must give. That is another discussion.

Implications for Leadership of Church Systems

WE CONCLUDE THIS CHAPTER with four implications that leaders within Church systems, whether local, regional or national must take into consideration if they are to lead these systems in this time of Transition.

1. Attempts to live out Christian identity that are not informed by the fact of Christendom's end will never be able to begin the transformational journey required in a Transition phase.
2. Leaders must develop the skills of standing outside their assumed organizational cultures in order to understand the levels of transformation required of them and their systems.
3. Leaders, not only among those they lead, but also within themselves, must manage the anxiety and resistance that is a natural part of the stability-seeking response.
4. Leadership strategies in Transition must be based on a thorough understanding of the core traits of culture, rather than responses to surface level changes at the society level.



Transition, Culture and Leadership

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, we looked at how each of us, our organizations, and even our larger North American context, are shaped by our cultural reality. Using Paul Hiebert's model of culture, we noted that culture is experienced on two levels: surface and core levels. On the surface are the easily identifiable expressions of culture—trends, fads, movements, etc. These cultural expressions are constantly changing. Because of their surface nature, they have relatively little impact on the deeper held foundations of social forms. Below these surface traits, are the core traits of culture where deeply embedded beliefs and values are held. Within a stable context, these remain relatively unchanged and constant. As we enter a period of Transition, however, the levels of change begin to erode these core traits. This is what we face in North America today on a macro scale, as well as within the many levels and expressions of the church and its place and role in North American culture.

Such an environment puts special demands upon leadership. It calls for leadership competencies very different from those in a stable environment. This chapter examines the interrelationship between Transition, culture and leadership through a specific framework of leadership and change within organizational culture.

Forms of Leadership in the Bible

IN BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, many images of leadership are portrayed. People like Abraham, Moses, and Joshua, Peter and Paul performed very different functions: patriarchs, judges, elders, apostles and presbyters. The priestly classes, similarly, played significantly different roles from those of the prophets and poets in ancient Israeli life. Apostles had very different functions from pastors or teachers. Clearly, Barnabas had a more integrative role among leaders. This brief catalogue of roles

is evidence of a significant diversification of leadership. At different points in Israel's history, or the church's development, certain of these differing roles had ascendancy and importance.

Leadership roles were determined by the change and culture stages outlined above. Thus, in the covenant-forming period, it was leaders like Moses and Joshua who were in ascendancy. As the people began to settle into the land and establish their covenant identity among other peoples who remained hostile toward them, the Judges became the primary leaders. Then, as the land became increasingly settled, the economy of Israel switched from nomadic shepherders to settled civilization-builders, Israel took on more and more of the values and habits of the surrounding cultures. It was during this settled period in the land that leadership was a shared process between the various kings and the priestly classes that ruled the Temple and controlled the feast days. The roles of these leaders became increasingly that of regulatory agencies who ensured that the correct forms of ritual and religious life were maintained. In this time the poets wrote some of their greatest works in worship, but they also expressed in their writings the echoes of unease with the accommodations. They longed for the Lord to reframe the life of Israel so that faithfulness to the Lord would again be the norm. In the midst of these accommodations, the prophets would bring their words of warning, calling the nation to return to former covenant fidelity.

Prophetic identity remained a marginal leadership identity throughout the long period of kings and priestly leadership in the land. Finally, out of the catastrophe of 587 BC, prophetic leadership came to the fore and envisioned a new covenant people returning to the land and taking on their identity as the people of God. Thus, we see a spectrum of leadership roles that coincided with the particular phase in which Israel found herself. While there were strong efforts made to preserve two typologies as normative—king and priest in the settled accommodation with the surrounding culture—this was not the way in which the concrete, historical reality of Israel's leadership was being worked out.

In the New Testament, we observe the formation of something dramatically new: the church. The texts bore witness to struggles over its nascent identity in both a Jewish and Gentile world. The dynamics of this formation were shaped by an accelerating outward thrust, along with a rapid increase in the number of people entering the church. Much was in flux. Order and function were being formed on the way; various leadership roles sprang up contextually. Clearly, leaders followed

synagogue forms in the establishment of churches. It is interesting to note that the synagogue was a product of the exile's reinvention of Israel's life. It was a social and religious form of identity for exile, diaspora, and marginal living. Liminality called for the synagogue, which, in turn, became one of the primary vehicles for the spread of the church throughout the world. The point of this is that forms and structures of life in formative and liminal situations will be creations that are distinct from the forms that emerge from long periods of settled, established identity.

In these early years of the church's development, diverse leadership roles were in operation. These roles seemed to be highly flexible and situational. They were not so much formalized identities within a well-defined organization, as functions that operated in order to facilitate and move forward the mission of the church. These roles had little to do with status, or regulatory functions. A wide variety of these functional roles were situational. Some were operative through a single person, but most spread through an array of vivid and varied personalities. The looseness of structures and the flexibility of identities matched the emerging, dynamic nature of the church as a liminal movement that was establishing a missional identity. A list of leaders would have apostles, evangelists, prophets, teachers, pastors, presbyters, and bishops.

It is only later, with the end of ancient Christianity as a marginal community in the Empire, when the Roman Empire absorbs the church into its identity, that these multiple roles begin to change. They are gradually reduced to a minimal set of roles that fit the established patterns and needs of Roman life. The leadership functions are limited to pastor/priests in settled, parish-like areas, and bishops over cities (See *Missional Church*, chapter 7, for a more detailed overview of this reductionism).

Leadership roles were increasingly shaped to suit a social institution within the empire. At this level, the church was quickly and profoundly alienated from its own dynamic, missional past. What happened to leadership, in this process from the early church to the triumphant church after Constantine, was nothing less than a revolution that altered the face of Christian identity and leadership in the West right up to our own time. The ascetic movements were part of the reactive process against this displacement of identity, with their shifts from the urban world of the empire to its desert edges. Christianity had contracted its life into the vision of the empire. Its leadership had been severely reduced by this accommodation sponsorship of that same empire. The Reformation did not address any of these profoundly troubling issues for Christian identity

in the West. If anything, the Reformation embedded the limited scope and the regulatory nature of leadership more deeply. The primary role of pastor-teacher, which came to ascendancy in this period, was, to a large extent, a regulatory role. One of the primary roles of leadership was in regulating the faithful in terms of what was true Word, true sacrament, and true discipline. For the most part, these functions and identities have carried on into this century. They have remained the dominant identity of leadership, the background against which the church has trained its leaders and the primary functions of those leaders. It is this long history, so quickly detached from the revolutionary missional identity of the church prior to Constantine, which functioned in a Christendom world. This has now run aground as the sponsorship of Western culture has been terminated. This is the current location of church leaders as they seek to re-orient their conceptual frameworks. They have been pressed into this Transition period where many of the cultural assumptions of their old world no longer hold, including their assumptions about leadership.

It is possible to find significant parallels between leadership roles and processes of change in Israel's life and some of the massive changes now moving through the church in North America. Furthermore, we have held tenaciously to one form of leadership, the pastoral model, all through Christendom and into our own time. This was not the way leadership was being shaped in the formative, missional period of the pre-Constantinian church. As we move deeper into the liminal Transition period, we need to recover more flexible and variable forms of leadership. We are finally being brought to the place of having to deal with our own crisis and re-discover the particular ways God would seek to reinvent leadership for this time. This brings us to the question of how leadership interacts with the change model we have developed.

Organizational Life Cycles

NATURAL PATTERNS OF CHANGE OCCUR. Lawrence M. Miller has written a book that presents a theory of organizational life cycles, derived from a study of leadership throughout history. He examines the long-term history of organizations as a way of identifying the stages of their life. In doing this Miller also develops a series of leadership typologies which accompany the stages of an organization's life cycle. He argues that organizations are like civilizations: they have a life cycle through which they move. This theory explains why so many organizations end up determined by leaders who are bureaucratic in

character and alienated from the shifting nature of the culture. Understanding the contours of those cycles gives vital clues about the nature of leadership in the organization at particular points in its life. This kind of understanding also reveals how organizations can break the cyclic patterns of decline and remain vital through phases of major social transformation. Miller argues that the failure of leadership and organizations to change, or to adequately address the challenges that confront them is largely a consequence of their failure to understand the change process. He observes that leadership is often deceived in its perceptions because the organizations they lead have dominated a large part of a market and have huge material resources that continue to suggest that all is functioning well. In this state leadership loses connection with the actual changes at work within the culture. Sooner or later, such leaders and organizations lose both their internal power and their vital market connection with the external environment. Fundamentally, a vital shift has taken place in the core culture of the organization, a shift that the leadership fails to recognize until it is too late (Miller 1989).

There are always two dynamics, or tensions, at work in any organization. The one is the outward drive of the organization around a compelling sense of identity and vision. The idea, the spirit, the passionate vision precedes all else. It creates the organization and, by nature, drives it out beyond itself. This is the dynamic of the early church described above. As success and material ascendancy grows, these values come to dominate the organization which then begins to turn inward and look after its inner systems and life. This is the second dynamic. The organization becomes focused on regulation and identity. Leaders are developed whose skills and passions match the regulatory character of the organization, the need to make all within the system subscribe to the normative expectations and practices of the group. This is a description of the church and its leadership throughout the long period of Christendom. It is this world that has come to a sudden end for denominations in North America. It is a world, however, still sustained and inhabited by many denominational and congregational leaders today. Miller's work goes a long way to explain the current state of leadership in church systems, as well as to offer some ways in which we might begin to move forward as leaders in Transition.

What follows is a brief synopsis of Miller's argument. He identifies seven stages of organizational life; we shall look briefly at the first six. Each of these stages has a corresponding leadership style that dominates in each period of the organization's life.

1. THE PROPHET

In Miller's terminology, this person is a visionary who is able to see new futures. An organization might be formed around this type of leader that has the energy to move forward into a created future. The prophet is driven with passion and the power of an idea. Detail, implementation and long-term organizational ability are not the skills of prophets. They have little time for these kinds of things. As a primary visionary, the prophet may not be equipped with the skills to actualize the vision. This often requires a concentrated, hard headed leader who is willing to implement change no matter what the price may be to the people in the organization.

2. THE BARBARIAN

This leader seizes the moment of crisis in the life of the organization. With single-minded determination, the barbarian takes the vision of the prophet and overcomes all obstacles in order to achieve the goal of re-making the organization. The barbarian sees the potential in the prophet's vision, has the capacity to organize that vision, and will do what it takes to turn the dream into reality.

3. THE BUILDER AND EXPLORER

These are the people who develop the specialized skills and structures required by the organization as it grows and develops. While the builder-explorer understands the vision, the focus of this leader is now turning inward. The time of crisis is past. Questions about whether the organization is going to survive or overcome the external challenges are passing. Now is the time to focus on the inner dynamic of the organization by developing its infrastructures. If the organization's primary leadership remains in the hands of the prophet, or the barbarian, then it will likely collapse from being left in a constant state of vision, crisis and innovation. Leadership turns to the more inner-directed, builder-explorer leader who shapes the organization's ethos, values, and structures. This is the time when specialized competencies begin to frame the organization. This is the stage where consensus becomes critical. The days of the single, heroic leader who pushes ahead and brings everyone along without consultation are past by this point in the life cycle of the organization. As the skills within the organization become more specialized and the consultative process becomes more important, the organization itself becomes increasingly complex. It is moving rapidly away from its early days of vital, make-it-up-

as-you-go structure. The attitudes and behaviors of people in the organization also change. There is divergence of values within and less focus on the world outside the organization.

4. THE ADMINISTRATOR

Initially, administration serves the needs of those involved in the mission of the organization. Gradually, over a period of time, the tables turn so that the reverse begins to happen—the whole company starts to be shaped by the rules, regulations and traditions that are located within the administrative leadership. This stage Miller defines as the Administrative Age. The Administrator, as holder of the traditions and regulations, becomes dominant. The organization begins to decline. The dominant ethos of the system is now shaped by a commitment to order and keeping those rules of the system that have been built up over the years. The primary focus of leadership is no longer on the mission of the organization in its relationship with the outer world, it is upon the managing of the inner life of the system. In this stage, the leader, as Administrator, is convinced that process is more important than producing the results that engage the organization with its mission. The creative people in the organization will begin to look for other fields in which to pour their energies and leave the company.

5. THE BUREAUCRAT

This leader imposes a tight grip of control over the entire organization. Any within the system who tend toward being prophets or barbarians are removed from places of leadership, thereby draining the organization of its creativity and outward moving energy. At this stage of the cycle, the leader is more focused on the symbols of authority—place in the organization, titles, positions, rather than the substance of the organization's mission. An entrenched resistance to change exists. This means that peaceful change within the organization becomes less and less of a possibility. The ways of dealing with problems are viewed in terms of re-organizing the system. In other words, solutions are always sought from within the cultural framework and administrative paradigm of the system. The culture of the organization has long since lost any real connection with its founding mission even though it continues to mouth the words of that mission. The real culture within the organization is invested in maintaining an inner way of life that has evolved through the Administrative Stage.

6. THE ARISTOCRAT

At the very end of the life cycle are leaders who have inherited the organization from those who came before, who built it up over a long period of time. The aristocrat merely lives off the system by continuing its ritual life. This ritualized structure carries with it the form and memory of the time when its prophets and barbarians shaped the organization, but all substance has long since been abandoned. The main function of the aristocrat is to maintain current function without further erosion of the system.

These first six leadership roles can be placed on a curve depicting the cycle of birth and decline in an organization. Decline will be inevitable when the issues of leadership and identity within a changing culture are not addressed.

A general principle is that without careful attention, organizations will choose leaders that fit the particular place they are located on the life cycle. There is, it would seem, a natural cycle at work that matches the style of leader chosen with the specific location of the organization in the life cycle. Thus, in the early days of vision and formation, the natural tendency is to select leaders who are more prophet and barbarian than administrators or bureaucrats. Similarly, as the organization establishes its identity, culture and market through a period of stability and development, its focus turns toward regulating and maintaining the culture of the organization. The tendency is not only to identify its leaders among administrators and bureaucrats, but also to actively deny access to leadership for prophets and barbarians. The key point to make in each of these instances is that they represent cultures. Core values are at work in each, which are radically at variance with the other. A passion for the outer-directed mission of the organization would contradict a passion for the inner-directed controls of the systems. Obviously, these are not two separate realities; each needs the other. Miller argues that the natural processes in organizations dictate specific leadership styles at specific places in the cycle. Organizations will rapidly move into a place where their internal life loses contact with the external environment and loses enthusiasm for the original mission around which they formed.

Organizational Change and Church Leadership Types

FOR A LARGE PART OF THIS LAST CENTURY, increasing numbers of congregations and denominations have been living in the assumed context of a settled, established

world. In this organizational location, they have been increasingly shaped by administrative and bureaucratic styles of organization and leadership. In the main, the forms of leadership that most pastors have been equipped to give are related to these two stages of organizational culture. It is this vital issue of organizational culture and leadership formation that has remained largely unexamined. Pastors are, for the most part, administrators and bureaucrats, regulators of Christendom culture, with highly skilled competencies in looking after the internal structures of church organizations and maintaining the traditions of those systems that have built up over a period of several centuries. A period of crisis has descended upon the churches. This crisis has not come from within the churches own internal structures of life, but from the disembedding of the church in North America. The uninvited end of cultural sponsorship, the ending of a functional Christendom, and the sudden deconstructing of modernity, have all conspired to remove the church from its assumed position as the reigning plausibility structure at the center of the culture. It is this external crisis that has engendered the current malaise in many denominations and congregations. An enduring and disturbing problem, at this point in time, is that much of the leadership within church systems, whether at the denominational or congregational level, are either administrators or bureaucrats by temperament and training.

The desperately needed leadership of the prophet, or barbarian, is largely absent from these systems. These kinds of people can find no compelling or attractive reason to connect their passions with organizational systems dominated by regulation and bureaucratic management. It will be very difficult to turn this around with wisdom over the next several decades. Church systems remain enclosed within organization cultures designed for a world that has past.

First, leaders must learn to escape the myopia of their current denominational worlds. They must learn to forget the world that shaped them and step outside the inherited frameworks. This is the first and necessary task before many of our current church systems can engage the liminal world of Transition.

Second, leaders must learn how to identify and bring into their organizations the leaders who are now largely absent: prophets and barbarians. These might not be the kinds of designations that sit well with church organizations. These leaders are new architects who can perceive structural formations that are not yet in existence; they are the apostles who will stretch a church system far beyond its inherited world. But these are people the present organizational cultures of church systems have carefully

developed internal environments to keep out. **Cultural antibodies within these organizations sense this kind of leadership and move rapidly to envelop and neutralize it before its effects can take hold within the organization.** In established Protestant traditions within which most of our work occurs, we have noted a tendency to lop-off at the knees these leadership types. This phenomenon has been so pervasive that church systems have very few prophets and barbarians within their ranks at any level.

Mechanisms and skills must be developed for helping current leaders deconstruct their internal cultural processes for ensuring the continuation of the present. Without this process, attempts to bring in new forms of leadership will end in failure. These types of leaders, whether called prophets, or apostles, or architects are now outside denominational systems. They tend to be young and have little affinity with the language, politically correct positions, values and current ways of reading the church's history. Bringing them into such systems will have to be a carefully framed process. If there is to be a future for many of the current denominations in North America, any involvement in the new missional identity of a liminal church, this will be an essential step. Will our systems allow this to happen?

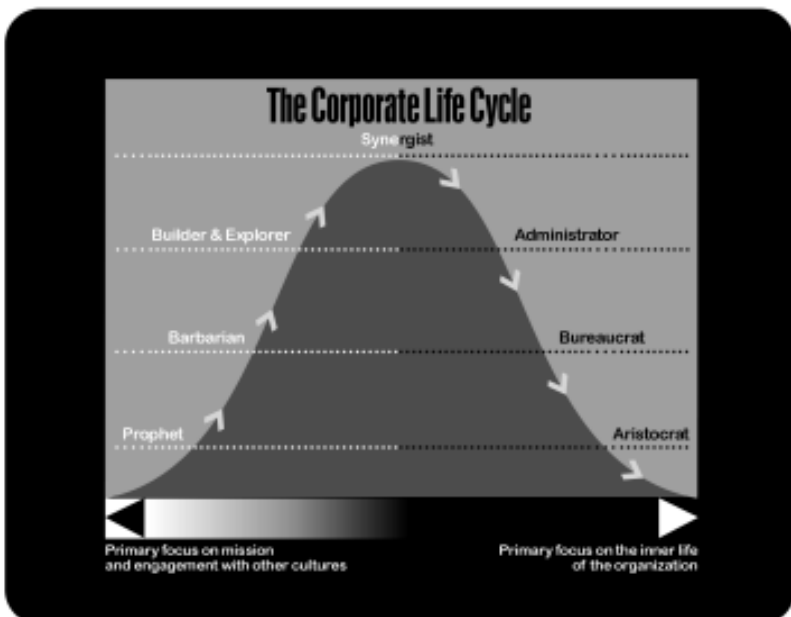
Certain types of churches are growing at this point in time. The statistical evidence for growth in non-denominational churches has less to do with theology, than with the fact that these congregations have been founded by prophets and barbarians with the skills to integrate good organization into systems that remain predominantly **mission-focused** in their direction. The same case can be made for many parachurch organizations formed at the mid-point of this century. Ironically, these same leaders could have functioned within the older systems to provide the type of leadership this period calls for, had they been allowed. Sadly, many felt they had to step out of these more established systems in order to obey the call of God. Some went the route of non-denominationalism. Others created structures outside these systems. Thus, we can recognize that in this whole conversation about change, and the cycles of an organizational culture, the question of leadership continually comes to the forefront.

Denominations and congregations in North America have lingered in that part of the organizational culture that would be described as administration and bureaucracy. They have trained up single person leadership models, with pastor as administrator and keeper of relatively young traditions. The leadership of denominations is drawn from this reservoir, continuing the micro-leadership structure of a Christendom congregation life in the macro-leadership of denominational life. In fact, it is natural for denominational leaders to think of their

primary leadership function as resourcing and enabling the pastor-congregation model of Christendom culture. The crisis facing the churches is both a long process of cycling through toward the downward side of the organizational culture in Miller's model and a deeply embedded accommodation of Christian identity to the categories of the larger culture. This culture is now moving through such a massive change in identity that all former accommodations with it are now rendered obsolete. Miller's categories of leadership may be connected with the change model presented earlier.

7. THE SYNERGIST

It is important to present the final leadership category used by Miller, that of the Synergist. Miller contends that organizations do not need to move through the whole cycle, ending in death, if they would only understand the dynamics of organizational culture. The key to this ongoing health of an organization lies in not allowing itself to be defined, dominated or led exclusively by any one of the seven roles he identified. While a difficult tension to maintain, the health of an organization depends on the leadership type he calls the synergist. This leader has the capacity to unify the diverse and divergent leadership types of Prophet, Barbarian, Builder, Explorer, Administrator, Bureaucrat and Aristocrat.



Synergistic leadership is based on the assumption that the cycle of decline can be ended by creating a mix of leadership that brings together the qualities and skills that will empower the organization's life, in both its internal and external functioning. If this kind of leadership mix can be developed, the organization will begin to thrive again. The synergistic leader is key to this process.

This type of leader is not locked into one leadership style, but incorporates the different styles into a single team. The Prophet, Barbarian, Explorer, Builder and Manager are brought into a balanced team relationship where all skills and insights are equally valid and important, but each has priority functions at different times in the life of the organization. The synergist's job is to create the social unity that will not only make this happen, but also help it become the ongoing culture of the organization. Certain roles will take the primary lead at one time, and play a secondary lead at another. The challenge of this role lies in leading people with significant differences in style and character. This balancing act is what creates the energy and vitality of the organization. Miller insists that all cultures and organizations that succeed in staying vital do so because of synergy both within the culture and in their interaction with the competing cultures around them.

Two particular ways of understanding change and culture are evident. Both the Old Testament illustration of change and leadership, as well as Miller's research on corporate transformation, lead us to examine the issues of change and leadership for the North American church.



A Proposal about Change, Culture and Leadership

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR at this point that various phases of change require a variety of leadership roles. No one role fits all situations. If the various leadership roles are not understood and integrated into the life of the organization, stagnation and decline are inevitable. Such leadership roles are more than styles. They describe different personalities, competencies and character types. They represent different people. It is the rare individual who can embody more than one or two of these leadership roles in a sustained way. This section will develop a leadership typology based on the preceding discussions and the need for a view of leadership that incorporates various styles and types of leaders. This model assumes that in the years ahead congregational and denominational leaders must make dramatic changes in their understanding and practice of leadership.

Effective leadership in a time of cultural transition requires a team of skilled people. Plural leadership, somewhat unfamiliar in the North American church, will be required at both congregational and denominational levels. The leadership transformations required over the next decade are immense. The entire culture of denominations and congregations will need transformation if there is to be a missional encounter with North America. The viability of the church on this continent is at risk. The crisis faced by the churches is such that it is no longer possible to simply manage and work at changes from within the current systems.

I argue that the chaos is so great in fact that we now must speak of the 'refounding of the Church itself'.... the term 'renewal' can no longer convey the immensity of the challenge we face. If refounding is to occur, however, the Churches desperately need people of imagination and creativity (Arbuckle 1990, 2).

Current systems were designed and evolved during the long period of stability that the church enjoyed in North America. The models of leadership that functioned in that period, already borrowed and adapted from the long development of pastoral roles in Christendom Europe, have little chance of providing the transformational energies for change in the current Transition phase.

Over the last forty to fifty years, a widely based literature has developed articulating the need for a movement away from the *sola pastora* model of church leadership adopted from the older Christendom paradigm. It should be recognized that what is being recommended is a change far more pervasive than simply the creation of a multiple staff. This response is little more than an example of managing the old paradigm by providing more of the same kind of leadership. What is required is a total re-thinking of the leadership models we have been assuming as normative. If the only thing required was a shift from a **solo** to a **multiple** pastor model, then the vast majority of Christian communities in America would be left outside this dialogue. The majority of congregations have neither the membership, nor financial base, to make these kinds of arrangements.

Furthermore, this proposal for a different understanding of leadership in the church should not be seen only in terms of a professional clergy. The needed re-thinking of leadership has to begin **outside** the core value paradigm of pastoral identity. This identity has been so formative and pervasive throughout the entire period of a stable-phase Christendom that it has never really been disembedded from the framework of the church's self-understanding. After continuous discussion about the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of releasing lay leadership that occurred in the last 25 years of the 20th century, the pastoral identity has remained embedded. Using the earlier Hiebert model of cultural traits, on the surface we have given much lip service to a broader framework of church leadership, but the core cultural value of *sola pastora* has remained.

As the crisis of the church deepens, however, one of the positive effects is that we are compelled to re-think this entire paradigm in order to reconfigure a different way of leading the church in North America. The pastoral model is being forcibly disembedded from its deep cultural entrenchment. Some are aware of this, many are not, but all are aware that church leadership does not mean what it used to mean.

At the core of this problem is the paradigm that governs how the church trains men and women for leadership in congregations. Given the changing landscape of Christian life in North America, we do not believe

the training can be left in the hands of the traditional seminary program. The centerpiece of church leadership training is the Master of Divinity program in the Seminary. This very program is designed to equip pastors for a stable church with local parish chaplains. It is based upon professional pastors who perform a care-taking function. It is a model oriented to the internal, rather than the missional.

The current Transition phase means that present models of pastoral identity are incapable of shaping and leading either congregations or denominational systems. Unless this issue is addressed within those systems and their training institutions, the leadership resources required for the present time will not be available. If these changes do not begin to happen in the systems, then there will continue to emerge alternative forms of leadership development from sources other than the traditional settings of seminaries and schools.

A Leadership Typology for Transition

A TEAM OF LEADERS with diverse abilities working co-operatively and interactively is proposed. *Communitas* is reflected in such a team, which requires an overall leader with the capacity to draw together the energies of the group. An integrative leader empowers the other members in all their different skills and roles. This kind of person is described, using Miller's language, as a **synergist**, someone who understands the variety of skills required and draws people together into an effective team. The typology of leadership described here represents a radical departure from the ways in which leadership has operated in most of the churches of North America. It involves the recovery of an ancient leadership tradition practiced in earlier periods of the church's history. Throughout the church's life, some groups and movements have comprised a radical and alternative history of protest and renewal.

If the assumption of this book is the recovery of a missional identity within the North American church, then some form of leadership based on the following proposal is essential. The disestablishment of the church provides hope for recovering the otherness of the church, its counter-imagination, rather than the chaplain function and its sponsorship in modernity. The caretaker function will no longer work. A missional identity means a willingness to deconstruct the pastoral images of leadership that have dominated this long period of chaplaincy and care taking.

In *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, & Liminality*, a typology

of congregational leadership for Transition was introduced, using the images of leader as **poet, prophet, apostle** and **pastor** (Roxburgh 1997). Such a typology assumes a plural, missional leadership team. These designations have connections with types encountered in our discussion of the Old Testament leadership. It also has affinities to New Testament images of leadership, for example, the list of leadership gifts and skills that includes diverse kinds of personalities (Ephesians 4).

The typology of pastor, poet, prophet and apostle introduces a leadership model that moves beyond this Christendom reductionism where the pastor is the primary generating model of leadership. Some basic descriptions of this four-sided leadership typology will be given in order to provide a framework for what is being proposed. What will emerge is the principle that different leadership skills need to be given primacy in different phases of the change process. This model is not, however, about one type of leader for all times and situations. Leadership expressions must be contextually aligned. A team of leaders of varying types may recognize that certain types and skills need to provide primary leadership at different points in time.

The first two types presented are those of the **poet** and **prophet**. They are presented first, because they are the primary leadership types that should emerge in a time of liminality and Transition.

Poets and Prophets are about people formation, not techniques for using people for programmatic ends.

Leader as POET

AS A CULTURE MOVES from the long period of stability through the Discontinuity and into the Transition phase, the levels of stress and anxiety in a group rise significantly. Two important dynamics are occurring at the same time. First, the community feels itself significantly disconnected and separated from the long established, stable traditions and frameworks that had given it meaning. Second, because this is an experience of the loss of core value meaning at the deep levels of culture, it is extremely difficult for most people to understand, or be able to articulate. Usually, people will feel a great deal of confusion, but are not able to provide words or

content that will adequately name the experiences. In this situation, people react to surface events as a means of dealing with the tension and loss of stability. Thus, a board will react to teenage boys wearing earrings and other body jewelry at school, but not actually be able to put reasons around their reactions because they are not yet able to recognize the real feelings driving their responses. Or, a large group in a congregation might react to the introduction to certain forms of music or worship. People are reacting to surface events but cannot articulate the real meanings, which are fear and anxiety reactions driven by the felt loss of core values.

This is not the point in an organization's life for its leaders to bring out a new strategic plan. People must first come to terms with the experiences churning inside. What is required of leadership at this point is an ability to articulate, or bring to verbal expression, the actual experiences of the congregation or larger organization. This is the poet's role. When John begins his prologue with the cadent language *In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became flesh*, he is expressing the way in which the inexpressible identity of the Lord became expressed in human form. The same kind of language is used here: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it* (1 John 1:1-2). God's identity and nature no longer remain hidden behind a cloud of unknowing. People no longer need to stretch out into a mystery beyond all their explanations. The meaning of God's identity is now brought out into the open for all to see and experience. In Jesus, God takes off the veil in order to be seen. In a corresponding sense, poets bring forth, make flesh, that which is hidden.

First, poets listen. In traditional cultures this type of person was skilled in the art of giving voice to the in-articulate feelings of the people. Here, the need is to neither criticize nor judge people's reactions, but bring to the surface the voice and soul of the people, so that they are able to give words to what they are feeling. Ancient poets would do this through music and story, imagery and experience. The core skills in this type of leader are the ability to listen to the larger culture and the ways it is interacting with the community, and to listen to how those interactions are affecting the people. In today's complex setting, many voices are speaking about the surface levels of change occurring in both the culture and the church. If leaders remain at this level, they will introduce their congregations to all the latest trends and strategies. The poet listens at a

different level and is not caught up by what is attractive or trendy in a surface level world.

In the postmodern culture there is a deep hunger to belong. An increasing majority of people feels isolated and marginalized. Experience is haunted by fragmentation. Many of the traditional shelters are in ruins. Society is losing the art of fostering community. Consumerism is now propelling life towards the lonely isolation of individualism. Many of the keepers of the great religious traditions now seem frightened functionaries; in a more uniform culture, their management skills would be efficient and successful. In a pluralistic and deeply fragmented culture, they seem unable to converse with the complexities and hungers of our longings. From this perspective, it seems we are in the midst of a huge crisis of belonging. When the outer cultural shelters are in ruins... the recognition of our hunger to belong may gradually assist us in awakening new and unexpected possibilities of community and friendship (O'Donohue 1999, xxiv-xxv).

The poet's role is in listening at a very different level. The poet's leadership is expressed through a movement in several directions at the same time. In the first place, the focus is on the people; the inner drives that shape them, giving form to their lives. In each of us there are rhythms: stories, events, symbols, values that combine in a variety of ways to form our uniqueness. Most of the time we are not aware, or self-conscious, of these rhythms. Today, people are being formed and determined by a complex combination of the multiple stories from the surrounding pluralistic culture and the stories from their traditions. What is happening to people in our congregations is that these stories no longer cohere with one another; they are pulling apart, becoming contradictory and dissonant. The result is an increasing level of stress and confusion. Usually, few are able to articulate these experiences. Therefore, people find it increasingly difficult to make sense of their world. This is part of the pain, anger and confusion of liminality in its early stages.

The poet's role is not that of the strategist who comes with solutions or plans for the new. The poet focuses on the people struggling with this confusion and loss of identity. The poet leads by seeking to raise to the level of recognition and conversation the feelings that are struggling inside people. The calling is to see and discern beneath the surface to the shifting core values that are creating the loss of stability for people.

Second, the poet takes the time to become immersed in the multiple stories that run beneath the levels of popular culture. The poet wants to feel the power of these cultural myths and stories, understand their power and messages, yet, be in a credible position to critique their claims and pretensions. Third, and most importantly, the poet is also deeply embedded in the tradition, the Christian story. The poet is a leader who has long lived within that tradition. The poet brings the ability to get inside the ways the tradition has been accommodated to the wider culture's own categories and ideologies. The liminal struggle that people in our congregations are experiencing is the fact that they have lost the sense of the Christian story among all the ideologies swirling about in our postmodern culture. Our people have few frameworks with which to see the difference between their Christian story and all the other competing stories that seem to reside in grayness of meaning. The current popular adoption of **spirituality** is an example of this process at work. The word is one with little or no content. One can put into it whatever meaning one wishes. It can shift and change to fit the time and the group with whom one is connected. Spirituality has emerged as a functional symbol that deals with the conflict and confusion of competing stories. Instead of having to sort out the truth content of various claims and counter claims, people merely become spiritual. As the wider culture of modernity is itself moving through massive transition, the Christians in our churches need to be helped to articulate the anxieties and stresses all these transitions are bringing upon their world. This giving word to experience is an essential step in the Transition phase.

Poets listen, enabling people to express and see the worlds that unconsciously live inside and drive them everyday so that they might begin to re-discover that Gospel story and rhythm of life that has been lost.

I learned the need for this gift of leadership the hard way. One day I was sitting at lunch with a good, wise friend discussing his unease with the consumer attitudes of the congregation. He complained about the continued, expressed need of people in the congregation that they wanted

pastoral care. In the midst of a somewhat disconcerting conversation, my friend made a statement that stopped me in my tracks. He said that sometimes people just didn't know what I wanted when I was preaching. I seemed to be asking things of them that they either did not understand, or found too demanding. My friend expressed how so many people in the congregation felt their lives were already on overload. They had little or no time to give to anything else. Then he said that, for him, it was clear they were trying to make Jesus real at the core of their lives. Immediately jumping to my defense, I pulled the knives and forks from around the table into a circle. Then I placed a spoon in the center of this utensil circle. My point was that, certainly, what most people in the congregation were looking for was that the church, and myself as the senior pastor, would find a way, spiritually, to make Jesus hold together all the demanding, fragmented pieces that drive their lives seven-days-a-week. My protest was that I could not do that for them because it was an artificial and diminished understanding of the Gospel and Christian identity.

Even as I spoke those words, which I believe to be profoundly true, I realized what was being communicated to the congregation and why they were expressing the need for care. They wanted to be looked after. What was coming through in my sermons was the message that they were not measuring up. I was laying on their fragmented, fast-forward lives, yet another set of *oughts* about Christian identity in our world. No matter how right, or good, or well intentioned those words might be, people simply couldn't hear them.

As I saw, more and more clearly, the tremendous levels of stress and demand upon these people in a world moving through such massive transitions, I discovered that I needed to lead them in a fundamentally different way. Until they were able to understand and give expression to the feelings and experiences that were driving their lives, they would continually shut down as they heard more *oughts* from the pulpit. It was in that context I began to learn how to communicate in ways that said I was listening to them, I wanted to hear and understand what was going on in their lives. The communication shifted from a word that told them how to change, to a word that communicated that their own soul was being heard. Then, in conversation, in teaching and preaching, the goal of leadership was to bring into conversation the rhythms of their fragmented lives and begin to connect that with another rhythm which had been lost in all the alternative stories competing for ascendancy in people's lives. This is the way of the poet.

For years, Percept has insisted that the church must stop talking and start listening. Our core identity is that of a telling enterprise. In such a time of Transition as this, both within the Church, as my experience above suggests, as well as within the larger culture where the Church has been marginalized, we must learn to listen, feel, and crawl inside of the thoughts and experiences of postmodern people. As we do so, we will be able to give expression to our experience through the core story that is ours and provide a word of meaningful hope for a fragmenting world. This is also the way of the poet.

Images of leader as *entrepreneur*, as *capable change-agents*, or as *future-faith church creators* catch the current spirit of leadership development. Poets are visualized as rather dreamy-eyed people who have impractical words and imagery for those bent on contemplation rather than changing the world. When there seems to be a general demand for forceful, forward thinking leaders who can deal with the situation at hand, the idea of a leader being a poet is one that seems far fetched. Why would one recommend the role of the poet as a significant leadership calling at this point in our history?

Poets are people who are gifted and have disciplined themselves to see the world differently from most. They are not so much advice givers as **image framers**. We believe that God's word has become enclosed within the ideologies of modernity and a failed Christendom. This being the case, then one of the most serious needs of our present situation is for leaders to see the shape of the ideology, understand the captivity of God's story within those ideologies, and disclose these realities to people, in ways that they too might see. All the future planning, all the entrepreneurial leadership devoid of the poet's gifting, can only lead the churches down more of the same utilitarian and technological dead-ends that have contributed to the church's current malaise in our culture. Poets are leaders for our time, who evoke the words and images that disclose the captivity in which we are enmeshed as Christians.

In the present time, missional communities will be formed through the work of leaders who can articulate the experiences of their people, giving voice to the captivities that beset us and pointing to the ways in which our inner longings and desires might find hope rather than despair. The tension that is created at the beginning of the Transition phase is precisely this one between hope and despair. People are being disconnected from their old worlds with frameworks that have lost their power to engage our time. The narratives and values that shaped our lives as citizens of

North America through much of our history have lost their power to inform our present, threadbare moment.

The loss of that world...is enormously frightening and disturbing... our fear invites us to gestures of nostalgia, and it reduces us to acts of brutality...our culture is one in which an old imagined world is lost, but still powerfully cherished, and in which there is bewilderment and fear, because there is no clear way on how to order our shared imagination differently or better (Brueggemann 1993, 19).

Ours is a deeply dislocated society in which the old certitudes, old privileges and old dominations have become ineffective, frayed and fragile. We experience our lives today more like the torn, tattered fabric of an old, well-worn coat that no longer covers or keeps us protected from the elements. Because the threads of individualism, technique, materialism and autonomy wove so much of that fabric, we have little ability to discover the resources that might bind our lives together again, providing us with new clothing. As a result, many in our churches are quietly bewildered, seeking only ways to survive in a seemingly hostile environment. We are beginning to realize how hard this situation is for people. Almost all our frameworks for thinking about our lives and for responding to this present situation of crisis and Transition have been shaped by patterns and categories formed on the assumption that there was no crisis. Denial and despair, coupled with a powerful desire to recapture the nostalgic past, are increasingly the forms of response. It is extremely difficult for leaders to persist faithfully in this situation and guide people with an imaginative openness to the ways God might be re-shaping and re-awakening His people. This is the place of liminality where the poet's skills are most needed. Eugene Peterson points to this.

Pastors and poets do many things in common: use words with reverence, get immersed in everyday particulars, spy out the glories of the commonplace, warn of illusions, attend to the subtle interconnections between rhythm and meanings and spirit...Poets draw us into deeper respect both for words and for the reality they set before us (Peterson 1993, 155).

The overarching desire of the poet revolves around the question: How can I help people to see differently? As Brueggemann states so well,

the poet stimulates, hints, paints pictures, creates imaginations that run counter to the dominant ideologies. Poets move in two directions at the same time. They evoke the presence and give language to the perplexity, confusion and despair that must come with the loss of a world, but they also make available a future that does not exist—open-ended, yet filled with anticipatory hope.

The Transition phase is the serious journey toward that imagined world by those who have, at last, recognized that a death has taken place. It is not the poet's role to articulate the contours of that new world, for it does not yet exist. The pressure, however, to do just that is immense. In their loss and grief, people will fold back toward the ways of life they have known in the world that has been lost. We are in an in-between time. The biblical image is that of exile, and exile is a time and place that cannot be rushed and does not lend itself to easy solutions.

People want the poet to be **practical** and **useful**. It is so extremely difficult to leave behind the habits and desires of a stable world. Even when we know that such a world is passing away, it continues to have the power to shape our identity. Nostalgia, habit and unexamined assumptions easily turn into the demand for solutions. The poet does not bring solutions but a way of asking questions, a way of seeing the world through fresh eyes. The poet knows that only in this asking and seeing is it possible to move forward in this journey toward the future of God.

I once gave a series of lectures to a large gathering of mission organizations from across North America. They were seeking to understand the meaning and shape of postmodernism. I had the task to lead a series of Biblical expositions. The four texts I chose for this purpose were Jeremiah, Nehemiah-Ezra, and Acts 1-13 and 1 Peter. All of them were texts about Transition. In each case, the dominant metaphor used in shaping the conversation around Scripture, our situation, and postmodernity was that of **exile**. At one point toward the end, a well-known missiologist engaged me in conversation. Many conversations that weekend revealed the interest and concern people had for this thing called postmodernity. The missiologist frankly admitted that he could not accept the notion of exile in relation to our North American situation. Yet, many pastoral leaders struggling to come to terms with what has happened in their congregations readily felt the power of this word. Indeed, it was becoming a central imaginative metaphor for a marginalized people. The language of **exile** is a fitting metaphor.

Poets use words: metaphors and symbols. These are tools that have

fallen into misuse in an age of technique, quick fix, and how-to books. If we can't plug it in and use it immediately, then the object has far less value to us; it is not functional. Functionality has become one of the mantras of our current ideology. Poets do not operate in this kind of world. Metaphors are not intended for functional purposes. They are meant to be lived in, savored, allowed to root down deep and take a form of their own. Metaphors are not to be controlled nor put to some practical use. They are like a virus in the body that surreptitiously enters the blood stream, lies deep in the body and begins a work of transformation. Poets use metaphor to create the imagination of an alternative world. Consequently, their language is ambiguous and unclear.

The poet has to have a profound trust that God takes those words and, in God's own time, uses them to shape the imagination of God's people in new directions. The poet is not a strategist and does not have a five-year plan that gets us to the Promised Land. The great gift of the poet is that he/she enables the people of God to begin dealing with the loss of a world and begin hearing the possibility of an alternative imagination.

The poet is a kind of in-between person. Like the pastor, the poet is drawn to that side of leadership that longs to care for and watch over the people of God. Unlike the pastor, the poet is also deeply committed to engaging the imagined future that God calls into being. Like the prophet, the poet understands that this imagined future will, necessarily, involve great grief and travail for the people of God as they journey toward that, as yet, unfocused, alternative life. The prophet's heart is not primarily directed toward the care of the people of God, but toward the desire that the people of God rediscover the Word of God in the midst of their exile. This is why the Transition phase, in all its overwhelming complexity, cannot be led by a sola pastora, nor any other pastoral model. A team with multiple gifts guiding the life of the community is necessary.

Leader as PROPHET

THE PROPHET'S ROLE is about the recovery of a world. The prophet's passion is the reforming of common life around the rhythm of God's story. While the poet's role is to enable people to acquire an understanding of the inner experiences shaping them, the prophet calls this same people to acquire a certain kind of knowledge. The Transition phase is about people becoming aware that they have lost their story and dwell in an in-between land, but also want to recover the lost story. The prophet is aware that

this lost story has, in reality, become one of the biggest obstacles to encountering God's story. Indeed, the story that people have inhabited immediately prior to the Disembedding and Transition phases is usually one that has moved a long distance from the original story in its accommodations to the larger culture. Harold Bloom, in his book *The American Religion*, describes the form of Christianity in North America as Gnosticism. He argues persuasively, that what emerged in America over the past two centuries is not the Gospel one encounters in the New Testament, but a deformed caricature of the Gospel more akin to the early forms of gnosticism that almost eclipsed Christianity in the early centuries of the church. The prophet addresses this social and theological reality.

...Mormons and Southern Baptists call themselves Christians, but like most Americans they are closer to ancient Gnosticism than to early Christians...most American Methodist, Roman Catholics, and even Jews and Muslims are also more Gnostic than normative in their deepest and unwariest beliefs. The American Religion is pervasive and overwhelming, however, it is masked, and even our secularists, indeed even our professed atheists, are more Gnostic than humanist in their ultimate presuppositions. We are a religiously mad culture, furiously searching for the spirit, but each of us is subject and object of the one quest, which must be for the original self, a spark of breath in us that we are convinced goes back to before the Creation (Bloom 1992, 22).

The prophet leads people, not into the possibility of finding themselves through some inner-directed reflection, but through a re-engagement with the true story, a story that is bigger than themselves and radically different from the needs-centered, personal success story that has come to inhabit the church in North America. The prophet knows that the people who comprise our congregations are profoundly uninformed and uneducated in this alternative biblical story. The work of drawing people out of themselves so that their lives are re-centered in God's story is an enormous task for the church today and an essential precursor to the emergence of a missional church that may encounter our culture with the Gospel.

In 587 BC, the Babylonians under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, descended upon Jerusalem. The city walls were torn down, the temple destroyed, the Davidic monarchy was brought to a crushing end, and all the practices of Jerusalem worship ceased. This was

a devastating event in the life of Israel. The best people were deported to Babylon where they sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion. They could no longer sing the Lord's songs in a strange land (Psalm 137). If one reads about the reasons for this event, especially in the prophets like Jeremiah, it becomes clear that during a long period of nation building and stability in Judea, a story had grown up that Judea was the center of God's activity. In this story, God was going to keep Judea—city, temple, monarchy, worship practices—intact and defend it against all opponents. Over long years, Judea failed to recognize that this story became the dominant, stable myth shaping their lives and their understanding of God. It wasn't the real story of God's desires or purposes. It was a constructed myth that had come to shape their lives over a long period of stability. This story had come to form their core values. Yet, it was a distorted story.

If the exiles had assumed that this story was the one they had to recover, then God's people would have continued to completely misconstrue God's purposes and God's story. What happened was that during more than seventy long years of exile, these people had to encounter the painful fact of their failure to faithfully live by God's story, and then, recover that story for themselves. This was the central work of the exile and the message of the prophets in exile. In our day, the loss of our stable stories in modernity and a functional Christendom parallels what happened to Israel in 587 BC. This is our time of Transition and liminality. The prophet's role is not to develop strategies for returning to Jerusalem, but helping the people to re-hear God's story which has been lost in the surrounding culture. This, in no way, is an attempt to recover some kind of primitivistic identity for Christian life in North America. Obviously, the Gospel must continually be contextualized so that it may be heard within a culture. The prophet's role focuses on helping the community of God's people to recover the Gospel story so that they are able to contextualize their lives from the perspective of that story. This stands in stark contrast to viewing lives through the lenses of a story that has been so accommodated and transformed by culture's own stories that it bears little relationship to the New Testament story.

The prophet is a person gifted with the ability to indwell the tradition. This leadership gift is one that understands what is essential about the tradition that now needs to be brought forth again, and how the people, usually in the midst of great stress and transformation, need to recover and re-appropriate that tradition. The prophetic imagination builds upon

Prophets lead God's people into recovering God's story and so re-forming the community as a distinct people.

and directs the discourse of the poet. The poet leads people to an articulation of the pain and loss in their souls; the prophet helps them move toward a vision of how and where God may be shaping them in the midst of their transitions. The gift of the poet is to raise up the voice and soul of the people in relation to both the culture and the tradition. The gift of the prophet is to bring the other word that comes from the outside and addresses the people with a fresh sense of direction.

The prophet's role is complex. It requires a lot of time because, at heart, its role is to reconnect the people with their core values. Usually, in a process of change, people have lost the actual meaning of their core values. Over a long period of time, these values have come to be re-interpreted in terms of outside values. In our time, much of the gospel has been reduced and re-interpreted into the core values of modernity to the extent that it is now very difficult to actually encounter the core values of the biblical Gospel. The way in which individualism, the ideology of the separate self, expresses itself in our interpretations of salvation is one example of this dynamic. Our ecclesiastical life is now structured and marketed to this constructed self. The extent to which this value has penetrated the churches can be seen in two remarkable ways. First, many evangelistic presentations are expressly marketed to some form of **individual salvation**. Second, when one dares to say that the Gospel is not primarily about individuals in our sense of the world, one is met with consternation and incomprehension. Contextually, the postmodern turn is an ongoing rejection of this modern construction of the person in terms of the separate self. Yet, for all of this century, the central thrust of the church's message has been directed and shaped by this ideology of the individual. Most leaders in our churches could not comprehend what a postmodern philosopher like Michael Foucault means when he declares that man is dead. It is precisely the death of this constructed individual that Foucault and many others are describing. Only by re-inhabiting the foundational story that God has brought to us through Scripture and tradition will the church be able to comprehend the identity God calls it to have in this new world. At this point, the church needs a radical

conversion of its own self-understanding. Another example of how the core story has been reduced to the values of the larger culture is seen in the manner in which the modern notion of voluntary societies has infected our understanding and organization of the church. The role of the prophet is to lead the people to encounter God's story in the biblical vision, so that they can discover again their core values. When this happens, the nature of the community is radically turned in a new direction.

The prophet proclaims the God who creates new social possibilities in a world of crisis and turmoil. Perhaps the greatest example of this comes from the utterance of Isaiah: *Behold, I am doing a new thing* (Isaiah 43:19). This is a word addressed to a people still consumed and preoccupied with the old world. It is also an amazing declaration of imagination and hope for it is spoken in the midst of a time when there are no markers on the horizon that will substantiate the announcement. Like the poet, the prophet also discerns a world that almost no one else can see. Yet, there is a real and important distinction in the primary focus of each. Like the pastor, the poet's primary movement is one of concern *for the people* and the desire to evoke in them a new world. The prophet's focus is toward giving tangible expression to *what God is saying* to the people. While the prophet often speaks in the language of the poet, the intention and drive is not primarily the *people of God*, but the *word of God*. These are not intended as artificial distinctions. The model developed in this book proposes that each role would have place and legitimacy. Together, they would represent the whole of God's care and intentions, particularly in a time of major Transition.

As our whole culture moves away from the canons of modernity, the church continues to sail into new waters where these older ways of framing the conversation have less and less power. The poet sees that the world is changing. The prophet does not primarily have an astute sociological sensibility toward the many trends expressing themselves at any particular time; on the contrary, the prophet's unique and essential gift lies in hearing God's story and God's Word in the midst of the change. The prophet's work is calling people toward what is being shown by God, something that will be distinct. This is why the prophet is a person shaped by an alternative imagination that cannot be nicely located in the ideologies of the present time. The biblical language of this imagination is of a new social reality, of God's kingdom. That is why Isaiah's words most clearly express the prophet's role and imagination: *Forget the former things! Listen, I make all things new* (Isaiah 43:18-19). In these words are located a radical

new locus for living by all those who come to hear the wonder and power of the announcement. It is about the God of Israel who is making all things new. Prophetic work is utterly God-centered. The prophet is passionately aware that any other locus is merely the accommodation to the ideologies of the time. This is precisely what needs to be broken in the place of exile and Transition.

This is the work now facing North American Christians. The prophet's particular role is inviting people to journey from an individualized, religious consumerism, where church has become a voluntary society shaped to meet individual needs, to something radically different. In our time, one of the prophet's roles is to announce God's call for people to begin resisting the ways in which the Gospel story has been subsumed on this continent to the personalized, individualized categories of modernity. The prophet today calls the church toward a renewed embracing of a God-centered way of life. This is a radical, counter-cultural shift at the dawn of the new millennium. This difference is the formation of a people whose lives and practices are shaped by the presence of Jesus and the reign of God. A great deal of the ambiguity of our time is not limited to the socio-cultural shifts now transforming our world; it is profoundly connected to the need to confront and confess how the Gospel has been reduced to the categories and frameworks of modernity. Our Transition is the uncomfortable struggle to re-discover the Gospel in the midst of a world we came to inhabit, as if it were the very expression of Christian identity. The prophet functions pre-eminently in this in-between time of liminality.

... our agenda is less to change the world than to change ourselves and to resist the fragmentation, reductionism and spiritual emptiness of the world (Christian Century, July 16-23, 1997).

In the midst of Israel's crisis of exile in Babylon and all the anxious fear of life being lost, came Isaiah with the incredible words "Your God reigns!" Isaiah came with a radically alternative story about what was happening in the world and what was meant to shape the exiles in the midst of their liminality. If the poet works at getting people in touch with the anxieties and pain of a time and place, the prophet calls back into memory the subversive story of God's presence. The prophet works at the question of how to live faithfully into that story. One is continually struck

by the popular images of the prophets of the Old Testament. Throughout much of this century this role has been understood more in terms of the Greek soothsayer, or modern astrologist, than the biblical prophet. The emphasis is constantly upon the ability of someone to peer into the future and offer clues, or outlines, or predictions of what is going to happen in the future. This is not the primary identity, nor is it the preoccupation, of the prophet in the Old Testament. Nor is the biblical understanding of the prophet located in the modern image of a social activist, or crusader, fighting against the machinations of government for the failure of the middle classes to care for the poor. As important as these activities may be, they are not the biblical understanding of the prophet. At the center of the prophetic perspective is this odd and passionate need to articulate that God is at the center of the story, not human identity.

Leader as APOSTLE

AN APOSTLE IS A LEADER with a clear sense of calling, mission, strength, and urgency, all directed to the active creation of a new future. This new future is shaped and dependent on the work of the poet and prophet. The Bible is full of such people.

In the Old Testament account of the captivity, Judah did not remain in exile. Out of the liminality of exile emerged a new vision for God's people. In the return to Jerusalem, as well as the creation of synagogue life throughout the Diaspora, people emerged with the gift and calling to bring about a new kind of future. Through the poet and the prophet a new future starts to be imagined. The Transition phase eventually leads toward a re-formation of the community with a missional identity. The cultural forms that will shape North America through, and beyond, its postmodern and post-Christian period, will gestate in the Transition phase, and emerge as new forms of church life. The apostolic function will lead the people of God into this future. What is starting to be recovered is the understanding that the church, in all its forms, is fundamentally apostolic in nature (Scudieri 1995).

Apostles lead God's people into the new missional future.

A MISSIONAL CHURCH WILL HAVE AT ITS CENTER AN APOSTOLIC IDENTITY AND AN APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

As the process of change moves through the liminal, Transitional phase, leaders who perceive the nature of these new church forms will emerge. These are apostolic leaders. Using the language of Lawrence Miller, these people are somewhat akin to the Barbarians. While this may not be the most positive of images, it captures the nature of a leader who has thoroughly understood the crisis through which we are moving, and has also been able to grasp the outlines of the future vision which will emerge from the chaos. Even more fundamentally, this is the leader who can integrate these outlines into a passionate building of that new future. The Barbarian turns dreams into deeds. This is the Apostle's role. The apostle is like an architect who can turn constructed dreams into concrete realities.

This kind of apostle-type leadership is not absent in the previous phases; however, such leaders are not the primary leadership functions in other phases. Their passion and single-minded focus on accomplishing the task ahead, usually makes them threatening kinds of people to a system as it moves out of stability. The tendency of systems that have not yet recognized their Transition state is to marginalize the apostolic gift because it threatens the entire culture of the organization. Furthermore, because this type of apostolic gift has hardly been recognized in the pastor-dominated paradigm of leadership, it has often been difficult for those with apostolic gifts to understand both their position and impact within these systems. In the early stages of Disembedding, the apostle is often intuitively aware that the current structures and frameworks are no longer able to sustain a relevant encounter of the Gospel with the culture. This intuitive skill, however, often gets communicated as a negative criticism of both what exists and the people trying to make the old system work. They are, therefore, rightly perceived as predominantly negative people and are pushed to the margins of the organization. At this moment in time, both organizational systems within the church, as well as those with the apostolic gifts, need to discover ways the apostolic gifts can be granted affirmation and legitimacy.

The apostle accepts the work done by the prophet in re-shaping the imagination of the people around a recovery of the core values of the tradition. Building on this, the apostle has the ability to re-shape the identity of the people so that they can re-engage those core values in a new situation. The apostle has the ability to envision and implement the practical ways in which that new indwelling of the core values will take

place. What the apostle will uniquely bring to the leadership is the continual call of the people of God to the outward journey of engagement with the culture. The single-mindedness of this passion can be very disconcerting to others, but it also starts to build in a new kind of stability as people enter yet another stage of change. It is the privilege of the apostle to have the God-given ability to envision what these kinds of engagements might look like, and the practical skills in leading people to embrace missional life in a new situation.

The apostle is more than just an outer-directed, action-orientated personality. The gifting of this leader is to filter the new cultural context through the lens of the Gospel so that an encounter takes place between Gospel and culture that transforms the church. These kinds of people are passionate in their vision and commitment to goals. People gather around the apostle because they sense the conviction and the energy. The apostle embodies an unshakable faith in the emerging future that people want to follow. What makes the apostle different from the prophet in function is the ability to implement vision. Obviously, a leader whose dominant skill type is that of the prophet can become an apostle; however, they remain distinct leadership roles. The one is closely connected to the other and some leaders may combine these two roles. It should be said that while the apostle has a great sense of care for the people, the focus of activity and passion is not in the direction of caring for the people in the ways a pastor, or poet, would. The apostle is more like the general in an army. There is a plan and a direction. The troops are loved with great compassion. The apostle will see to it that those who struggle in the journey forward receive care from others, but the apostle turns all of his/her energies and passion to the goal that lies ahead. In other words, the apostle cannot be expected to manifest pastoral gifts as a part of leadership. The heart to care for people may be present, but the drives to follow God and achieve the dream are the primary passions.

In the Old Testament, Nehemiah would be an apostle. In the New Testament, Paul is an obvious example of this role. In his letters to the young churches, he has great tenderness and compassion toward the people. The pastoral heart is there, but beneath it there is the hard, driven passion of the barbarian whose single-minded intention is to get on with implementing the task set before him. His fierce confrontation with Barnabas over the ability of Mark to be a part of the mission band is one example of this apostolic gift at work. While Barnabas was directly focused on the person of Mark, seeing what the young man would become, Paul

was driven by the immediate need and the task at hand. He wanted competent people about him who could take direction and get on with the task. It is this kind of leader who transforms systems and organizations from bureaucracies and tired organizations to vital structures. In our day of politically correct bureaucratic leadership, this kind of role has received a good deal of criticism. This role is diminished in all the discussions of systems-leadership, servant-leadership and non-aggressive leadership values. Epithets like ‘authoritarian’ and ‘non-consultative’ are often used to disparage the role of these leaders and protect the real agenda of the organization—to maintain current paradigms and leadership.

When an organization is moving through crisis and chaos, the apostolic leader is essential. Over the past half-century, as churches have increasingly moved into a management-bureaucratic style of leadership, with emphases on managing the system and using the regulatory role of process, apostolic leadership has been diminished and devalued. There are now few within these systems with either the desire, or ability, to take on this kind of leadership. Just at the point where denominations require a leadership that is radically different from the manager-bureaucrat who has been in ascendancy for so many years, those with the prophetic-apostolic gifts have turned their passions and talents elsewhere. This may explain, in part, the growing phenomenon of the Next church models we see emerging in America. These tend to be large, independent congregations of significant size. As one leader of such a church said, with a church of some 10,000 members they are already bigger than a lot of denominations. These types of churches tend to be led by people with prophetic vision and apostolic passion. They have created their own systems for training their leaders and they represent a dynamic new form of church on the cultural map. We do not say this to present them as the next, new alternative for the church’s future. That would be a grave mistake. What they do suggest, however, is that prophetic-apostolic leadership, so essential in this phase of Transition for many denominations and congregations, continues to be drained off into those church structures that will allow these gifted leaders the scope to lead. Denominational systems will need to address this challenge very soon if they are to negotiate the far end of the Transition phase.

Denominational systems continue to identify the liabilities of the apostle as leader: insensitivity to others, creating a constant sense of stress and crisis, too much control, and so focused on the outward-directed goals that they are unable to establish the requisite internal structures for

continuing organizational life. All of these characteristics can be true of the apostle. Having said all of this, why then do these systems have blind-spots to the liabilities of administrator-bureaucratic leadership? These, surely, are far more problematic when, in a time of massive transition, they continue to be the primary form of leadership being offered. It is time to stop marginalizing the prophets and apostles. They must be brought to the table because their time of leadership is now. They are critical for the Transition phase.

The apostolic leaders, who will be critical for the reinventing of a missional identity, are still being formed within the North American church. They are not likely to be located among the current leaders of our churches. Many of those now in leadership of congregations and denominations have been trained within the Christendom, sponsorship context of church life where the pastor has been the primary, if not only, typology of leadership. It will be difficult for those in leadership to make room for new types of leaders and to let go of familiar roles.

Leader as PASTOR

IT MAY SEEM STRANGE to place this type last when it has been the primary identity within churches and denominations for almost two millennia. The leader, as pastor, has been the primary role because of relative stability for a very long time. Christendom was a stable, ordered world, shaped by a framework of meaning and tradition that was largely unchallenged. (This is not to say that the centuries of Christendom were always stable, for clearly they were not and were often brutal, only that Christianity's place within the West was stable.) Even the Reformation period did not change this basic identity, it only shifted some of the inner functions of the role from priest to teacher. During, and following the Enlightenment when Christianity in the West rapidly lost its role in the culture, the pastoral role remained the primary identity. The most significant response to this eroding sense of identity came through Schleiermacher's redefining of the pastoral role. He is responsible for moving pastoral identity toward a professional identity within the cultural world of European Christendom. Professionalization, of one sort or another, has become the continual response of the church ever since the disembedding of Christian identity from the center of culture.

We have witnessed the almost universal inability of the church—Protestant churches more so than the Roman Catholic Church—to move past

this role as the primary leadership. Instead, we find the continuing core values of Christendom symbolized in the visible, surface trait of pastor. Further, the forces within the North American church (principally denominational systems acting as regulatory agencies and seminaries acting as training institutions) that continue to keep this role front and center also represent the inability to recognize that this pastoral typology functions as a primary role only within stable periods. We are long past that period of time. In continuing to create leaders based on this paradigm, we reveal how the powerful core values of Christendom remain the operative metaphors for training schools, denominational systems and congregational polity.

Shifts in pastoral roles toward adding skill development in pastoral care and counseling, beginning at the mid-point of this century, were attempts to revitalize this dominant role from within the shifting images and paradigm of the culture. Contemporary attempts to redefine the pastoral role are derived from business management and leadership development. This is not to critique the fine research that has been done in areas like systems theory and leadership development within the business schools. Rather, it is to point out that church systems have taken up the discoveries of these alternate learning systems in order to find fresh ways of recovering the primacy of the pastoral typology. Usually this has occurred with little, if any, theological grounding to relate these leadership roles to the core values of the Gospel tradition. These developments in pastoral identity have been largely an anxiety-driven response to the surface traits and trends affecting society. They have been shaped more by the canons of transpersonal psychology, the social sciences and business schools, than reflective attempts to reconstruct leadership images based on a missional ecclesiology.

This by no means implies that the pastoral role is unimportant. On the contrary, this gifting remains essential; but it must be seen in relationship with the other leadership types. It is a primary leadership type **only in the stability phase**. In all other phases, it functions as an essential, but secondary, role operative alongside all the other leadership types.

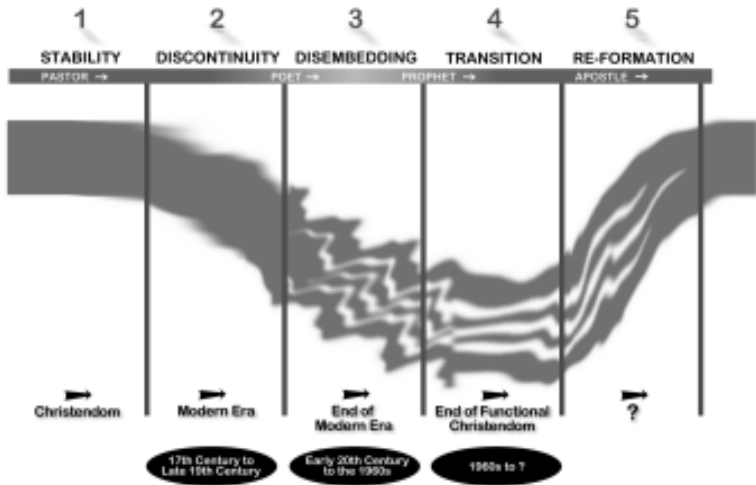
PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

1. Each type of leadership is essential.
2. Certain types will emerge as primary at certain points in the change process.
3. The typology emphasizes the essential need for a team of leaders at both congregational and denominational levels.

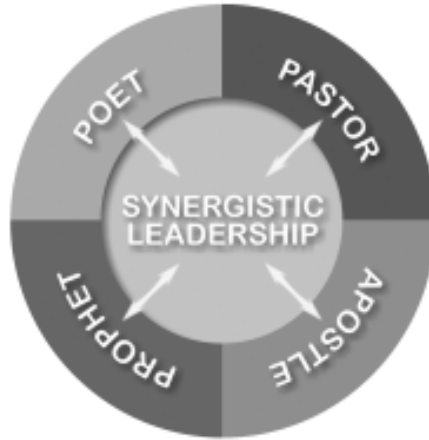
4. Certain leadership types are connected to certain kinds of personalities. It is rare to find one person having more than one or two of the types.
5. Pastors may function as poets, but will rarely operate as prophets or apostles.
6. Prophets and apostles will rarely fare well as pastors.
7. None of the types are an either/or proposition.
8. Each leadership type requires a synergistic inter-relationship to function properly.
9. The dominant leadership role of pastor has been shaped by the long, stable phase of Christendom. It has produced pastors who are basically managers and bureaucrats leading within an old paradigm.
10. Most of the current systems of schools and denominations continue to shape their credentials and training around this one particular leadership role for the church.
11. In the Transition phase a different kind of leadership is required. The prophet and apostle become more essential.
12. The challenge facing the systems is re-structuring their functions and identities to allow the prophet and apostle into primary leadership positions.

Five Phases of Change and Leadership Typologies

USING OUR ORIGINAL MODEL of the five-phase change process, it is now possible to add these leadership typologies to that model in order to see the primary places in which they function. It is important to note that this does not imply that only one leadership typology is operative in any specific phase of the model. This is not the case. In the best of all situations, each typology will be present in each of the phases. The model seeks to emphasize that in specific phases of change, a specific type of leadership will need to be given the space to shape the system. The manner in which these various leadership types might function will be addressed in the light of this model.



As Lawrence Miller pointed out, while the differing leadership types are essential for varying stages of an organization's development, when they remain dominant leadership types as the system moves through varying phases of change, this will create a process of decline and loss of vitality in the system. One way that the rhythm of decline and decay is overcome is through the creation of a team of leaders comprising these various typologies. The key to making such a team operative and effective over the long term is the presence of a synergistic leader. This leader can be drawn from any one of the types we have developed: pastor, poet, prophet or apostle. The key is that such a leader is able to transcend their particular type, calling together a team that works out of the variety of its strengths. It is this kind of team and this kind of leader that is missing at this crisis point in the church's life. The following diagram images what such a team might look like as the church enters the difficult, in-between phase of Transitions.



The idea of synergistic leadership relates to the functioning of a team of leaders with very different skills working together through the skills of a synergistic leader. The sola pastora model must be ended. So also must the denominational leadership models that resource congregations operating on the pastoral staff model. Any intentional desire to create churches that are both missional in identity and shaped for the constant change that lies ahead, must factor in the need to thoroughly transform both the congregational and denominational paradigms of leadership and relationships. The team typology, combining a mixture of leadership qualities, allows the energies and skills of people to be appropriately released and empowered for the transition and transformation of churches. It will require, however, a major reinventing of the way in which leadership has functioned within largely independent, self-contained organizational structures.

The synergist is able to operate out of more than one style, as well as incorporate differing styles within a single leadership team. The synergist has the ability to create and maintain a sense of common vision and unity among a diverse group of skilled leaders. In a church or denomination during this Transition period, the different skills to lead the group will constantly shift in all four directions. Pull and tension will thrive in this shifting process. At one and the same time, the responses of people will require the work of the pastor, prophet and poet, as people respond with a wide spectrum of reactions to the losses and changes. No single congregational leader can possibly respond to, or adequately deal with,

these often conflicting and confusing demands upon them. This is why many pastors today feel so stressed, stretched, and fragmented in their work. Increasingly, pastors are feeling deeply inadequate for the levels of demand that are being made upon them by congregations struggling with this very complex phase of Transition.

The synergistic leader functions in a team where there is a constant forming and reforming of leadership styles and skills, in order to address the many levels of demand that now comprise congregational leadership. The synergist continually works to convince each member of the team that his/her particular skills are essential for the church's future. The conviction and passion that different types and personalities bring are essential for a team to lead effectively. The synergist leader must have a high tolerance for diversity and ambiguity, and absolutely love these two characteristics of the Transition phase.

Leadership, Team and Transition: A Proposal

IN THE MAJORITY OF SITUATIONS where congregations cannot afford multiple staff arrangements, or they remain shaped by the sola pastora model, something radically different is required. We need a conceptual model of a missional church and leadership that will move past the models of church that have dominated since the suburban shift of the church after the mid-point of this century. It would seem that one of the most effective ways to **begin** moving toward the model of missional team leadership would be to re-shape the ways in which current staff function in both congregations and judicatories. The deeper implication of this model is the critical need to develop non-pastoral leadership as an essential part of a church's leadership. A simple sketch of a proposal might help to frame the ways in which the team model described above might be initiated. This is not intended to be a fully developed proposal, only an outline that suggests ways of implementing these ideas.

In a specific geographical area, the congregations could be gathered together around the leadership of a denominational executive to discover and build a missional leadership group for that area. It may be that the requisite leader types are not resident in any of these churches. In that case, those types absent should be found and invited to come into the team from other contexts. Clearly, the team would not have a one-to-one correspondence, for example, one pastor-type, poet, prophet and apostle. This is not a necessary balance. In all probability, the actual ministry

staff of the churches in the area will be comprised mostly of pastor types. The obvious challenge would be to create such a team from people beyond the ordained ministry of those congregations.

It is probable that many judicatories have this kind of functional model inherent in their polity, but have not practiced the essentially synergistic and missional character of the polity for a very long time. The precedents for such a model go back a long way in the history of the church. The current proposal is not a new one. In the post-apostolic period, the church in many cities was comprised of a series of house churches, or larger gatherings, each with its own specific leadership. The bishop was entrusted with the overall leadership responsibility for the churches in the city. In some of the earlier monastic orders, similar structures emerged. A helpful model for this discussion is what emerged in Ireland after Patrick. The abbot of the emerging communities shaped the overall life of a people, who saw themselves as both local expressions of the gathered church, and as a missional band commissioned to demonstrate and announce the Gospel through their lives. Within these missional communities were some exceptionally gifted and strong leaders who chose to function in their gifts and skills under the direction of the abbot or abbess. We have a rich reservoir of models and resources from the Church's own history to help us come to terms with the leadership challenges of today. We need to recover these resources in the rich traditions that grew out of serious attempts to engage culture. The power in some of these models is that they connected the need for communities of Christians shaped by disciplines and practices of the faith with a missional impetus back into the culture. This is exactly the combination that must be recovered today.

It is not wise to jump into creating these kinds of teams. In preparation, a lot of groundwork will need to be done. Congregational and denominational leaders need to be trained and equipped in some of the conceptual models developed in this, and other books addressing the missional challenge. Further, time is required to identify the different leadership types and skills that currently reside within an area. A focused and intensive training program would help leaders understand the dynamics of these typologies. The whole process of training is needed to explore how such synergistic teams would operate together. This is a journey that will require much wisdom and a great deal of skilled leadership training over an extended period of time. Fortunately, many of the elements required to do this have already been pioneered in other fields of leadership.

One could imagine, for example, that in a city where five to ten congregations were located, an executive minister would call together the leaders of these churches and invite them into a process of becoming a band of missional leaders for that area. That process might involve a five-year covenant to enter a time of learning, training and initiation. This is a process that requires a high level of commitment among those involved and must emerge from a carefully detailed plan. Some might choose not to join this process. New groups of Christian communities might emerge that would cross denominational lines. In many ways, the managerial-bureaucratic machinery of denominational procedures may need to be addressed. The process of formation could be long and tedious if people wanted to simply follow denominational policy to the letter. These policies could, alternatively, develop a powerful energizing desire to see the churches recover their identity as missional congregations. Larger systems of support would be required. Judicatory leaders would need to begin re-tooling themselves with skills for which they had not been trained. In such an area, the best leader of this team may not be the judicatory executive, but one of the leaders in a congregation. The missional community may require people to let go of their privilege and status. Unfortunately, this kind of model demonstrates that many of the current executives were trained and gained their experience within a model of pastoral leadership that is no longer sufficient for the present situation. These are the kinds of people who have a great deal of influence in systems. They may not have the role of becoming the bishop of a missional leadership band in a geographic area, but they can exert an enormous influence in preparing the way. They can build consensus and create an atmosphere of permission within systems that are generally very slow to change and suspicious of anything that falls outside the normative models of leadership and accountability. In the Transition phase, it is clear that leadership transformation at the most respected levels will be required.

Contemporary mission agencies have needed to deal with the radically changing setting of mission outside North America. It seems appropriate that as we come to understand North America as a missional field, the learning and experiences of mission agencies will become critical for the re-shaping of church life. As we move more deeply into a post-Christendom context, we will need to radically question and change the models of both church and denomination that have prevailed in North America during the long, stable period when Christianity had a virtual monopoly on the religious imagination of people. With the end of that

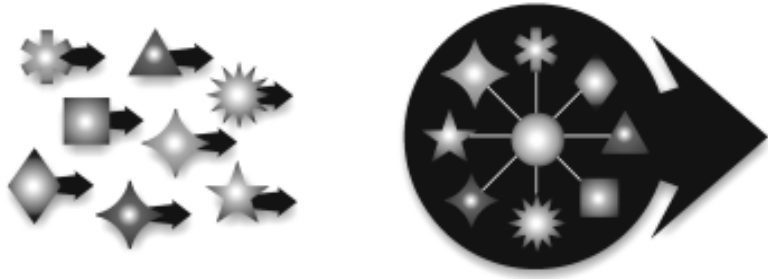
period, the time has come to learn again from our overseas missional leaders new ways of being the church.

One new methodology is known by the simple term, **Partnership**. Basically, the term describes the common sense perspective of differing groups in a geographic area choosing to collaborate with one another. Not very long ago, mission agencies in geographic areas would be in competition with each other, using resources and personnel to do essentially the same work as other agencies in the same area, in order to win the convert competition. Various agencies, bringing differing skills and ministries (radio, medical, educational, evangelistic), would have little contact with each other and, hence, rarely share their resources for the greater benefit of kingdom. It would be like building a house where each trade has little or no contact with the others. Mission agencies have moved far past this model; but, it still remains the dominant way in which the church functions in North America with individual congregations in a geographic area functioning in essential independence of each other. Denominational systems in specific areas function in competition with each other for the religious market. In either case, the potential leadership resources for a missional engagement in that area are dissipated in the continuing diffusion of Christian witness through denominational identity or independent congregational functioning. Obviously, a good deal of this reality will not be transformed. The market competitiveness of Christian identity runs deep in North America. This has been the primary mode of church growth for a very long time. It is time to discover the kinds of coalitions and partnerships that have characterized the larger mission enterprise for quite some time.

Partnerships are situations in which organizations do not give up their identity in order to work together. The partnership is like a strategic alliance where a group of agencies and their staff work as a team to achieve a common goal. For years now, Percept has provided a framework designed specifically to enable multiple congregations to enter into a collaborative process of missional reflection. Several of these Community Vision projects are being worked out, but all within denominational traditions. More recently, we have noted a desire in some geographic areas for cross-denominational collaboration using this framework. These are good examples of partnerships.

The two following diagrams show the ways mission organizations have changed in this respect. The diagram on the left illustrates the old paradigm of agencies working independently. The diagram on the right

shows the same agencies retaining their own identities, but working strategically, in partnership. The circle in the center indicates what might potentially be a team of leaders, functioning out of their specific leadership styles in order to resource and lead the Transition process among each of the agencies or congregations. The power of this model is in its ability to enable a cluster of congregations to share their core leadership through the creation of an overall leadership team designed to take a group of congregations through the Transition process. Such a model gives denominational executives a whole new focus on their role and identity within this phase.



Partnerships

THE CURRENT SITUATION in North America is long past the Stability phase, but it is neither in the Discontinuity nor Reformulation phases. The pragmatic and progress-driven core values that lie at the heart of our modern culture can easily drive us to inappropriate assumptions about how leaders need to respond. Assuming we have moved out of a stable phase and are experiencing a good deal of discontinuity relative to the church's identity in our culture, then the next logical step is to develop the strategies that will redesign and create the new church for the next century. This would be a shortsighted response to our current location. Such responses continue to be shaped by our captivity to the core values of both modernity and Christendom. These assume that a simple, rational-technical set of strategic plans can easily solve a management and systems problem, then move us into a new future, having fixed or improved the organizational culture of denominations. In the latter case, the positive response remains caught in the core values of a reigning, ascendant Christendom world and sponsorship within the culture. Neither response

is sufficient nor appropriate at this time.

If the model of change developed in this book and the report of our Transition and liminal context has any validity, then the actual location of the church in North America is in Phases Three and Four: the Disembedding and Transition phases. The stable period has been very long, even in North America, and the Discontinuity phase has lasted from at least the 1850s to the 1950s. It is reasonable, then, to assume that the next two phases are not mere stops that we can quickly by-pass with a little strategic planning. In point of fact, these phases of Disembedding and Transition are going to be with us for a long time. They are becoming the normative way of life for the church in a culture that has moved into a period of continuous, accelerating and transforming change with ever decreasing resources and ever increasing complexity. It is probably the case that the Disembedding phase did not actually begin to show itself in North America until the late 50's. In many places it is still being strenuously resisted. In our travels, we often pass through the southern states. There, one still finds vestiges of functional Christendom in place; it is still considered a 'churched' culture. It is not difficult to find denominations that cling to the illusion that we can keep things basically the same, or that the crisis of the church can be modified with small, manageable, incremental changes within the system.

The fact is that we are entering the experience of the in-between phase. In Canada, this is now the normative phase for the church. In the United States, this will be the next location of the church across the nation. The way in which the North American church responds to this phase will determine the nature of the Fifth Phase. The nature of leadership for this **Transition phase** cannot be a renewed or reformed **pastoral role**. That role will not disappear, but we must begin to find ways of leaving behind the values of pastor as primary leader and seek another paradigm along the lines of the synergistic leadership team.

A shift in some of our core values is needed. This shift needs to be articulated carefully. It does not mean a negation, or denial of tradition, but rather, the recovery of tradition in ways that enable us to take back the core values of Christian identity lost and subsumed beneath the categories of modernity and Christendom. The roles of **prophet** and **apostle** were identified with the last two phases of change. These biblical terms of leadership indicate roles that live deeply into the biblical witness and lead from that perspective, not a rush toward the next-and-the-new.

We need to lead people through this in-between phase of Transition

for a period of time that might very well take another fifty to one hundred years. This may seem like a long period of time. It may also sound somewhat discouraging and daunting for those who long to see when the church in North America will emerge from its malaise to become a vital witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. We need the perspective of time. We also need the outlook that this is God's church and God's work, not ours. It was one of the Neibuhrs who long ago said that anything worth doing takes longer than a lifetime. Those of us who are leaders in the church today need that perspective, for we are leading in a time of Transition. This is a demanding period in which groups can and must re-think the core commitments holding the church together, and reconnect with core traditions in ways that will profoundly change the church. This is not a passive waiting period, but an extremely rich, complex, creative time. While the surface traits may seem discouraging, another opportunity awaits the sleeping church to embrace its missional identity.



An Uncertain, Certain Journey

THIS BOOK HAS FOCUSED on the current location of the Church in North American culture. We have left the long stable period of Christendom behind. We have entered a liminal place, a place of transition between two worlds, one that is rapidly passing away and one that has not yet emerged. Confused and uncertain, the Church struggles to know how to think about itself and its place, normative in the Transition phase of change.

We have also argued that during such times, we must allow the poets and the prophets to speak. Together, from their unique perspectives, they help us reflect upon what is passing and revisit our core story, to create an imaginative space wherein new possibilities are born. This is an attempt, perhaps only a meager one, at modeling the prophetic role. Contextually, what follows was originally part of a presentation made to a group of denominational leaders, all of whom are facing the challenges of developing and supporting congregations in this time. The ideas presented here, from the poetry of Isaiah, are germane to all of us, addressing us through our hearts and our experience.

Breaking Christendom's Hold

IN 1999, THE REDEVELOPMENT OFFICE of the Presbyterian Church USA hosted its annual conference on redevelopment in downtown Los Angeles. To the complete astonishment of the organizers, more than 700 people attended from all over the country. Hearts soared at the possibilities implicit in so many lay and clergy leaders gathering to struggle and learn together about ministry in this strange new world that is emerging.

A week after the conference, hearts were as quickly dashed by a Presbyterian news service report about the event. The title of the article held great promise: *Presbyterians must Embrace Change to Renew Urban Congregations*. This followed.

(Pastor) Ireland knows from experience that church leaders who undertake redevelopments like Immanuel's must reach deep into the surrounding community to attract people of other faiths and other racial ethnic groups to fill the church and help pay the bills. (Presbyterian News Service, January 29, 1999)

It starts off well by reaching into the surrounding community. It begins to get shaky at the “attract people of other faiths and racial ethnic groups” depending upon what one means by attract. It drops off the map, however, with the final statement. Why reach and attract? The purpose is to fill the church's empty pews and pay the bills!

Now let's assume for sanity's sake that this reflects a reporter's assumptions about what redevelopment is. The truth is that many churches need more people to fill empty pews and help pay bills. This attitude reflects the vestigial reality of Christendom in its worst form. If redevelopment is nothing more than figuring out ways to fill our empty churches and to pay the mounting bills, then we should abandon the effort and close the churches. We have lost our primary mission and purpose for existing. In reality, such a model is nothing more than a club that needs members to strengthen its financial outlook. It is the last pathetic manifestations of the end of what is passing away, and in our mind, needs to simply pass away.

People are caught in a disorienting spinning vortex and struggling to make sense of it all. In reality, this is where the church experiences the era's end—as a decline of their church's membership and financial health. We have attempted to interpret this space as a liminal place, a place of marginality, a place of betwixt and between. Such an experience prompts longings for the former things, for the former stability. We shall not go back, however. A passage through a transitional place will not see us return to the former place. We will take some of the former with us, but such a passage—like the arrow of time—moves only in one direction, forward. The time of Transition means the experience of anti-structure, the end of what we have known. It will eventually give way to a restructuring, a re-formation, and a time when we arrive at a new place. New structures, new identity and new institutions will emerge. What we need are ways to help us interpret this experience in which we currently find ourselves.

The Concept of Exile

MANY ARE CALLING FOR THE CHURCH to find and interpret its location in this new place, in light of the experience of the Jewish exile to Babylon. This too was a marginalization experience. Having once been a nation whose origins were tied to Yahweh, the people found themselves wondering how to “sing the Lord’s songs in a foreign land” (Psalms 137:4).

Walter Brueggemann suggests that exile is more than geographic dislocation. He explains the experience of exile as “a loss of the structured, reliable world which gave them meaning and coherence, and they found themselves in a context where their most treasured and trusted symbols of faith were mocked, trivialized or dismissed. Exile is not primarily geographical but it is social, moral and cultural” (Brueggemann 1997, 2).

This was the experience of both those taken into captivity as well as those left behind. Remember, only around 4000 people were actually taken off to Babylon. For many of them, their personal lifestyles were not bad. Many did better economically. They were, however, a displaced people. At their core, they were struggling due to their loss of identity. The rest, mostly poor, remained in the land; their experience was exilic, none the less, because all of the social, political and religious structures that had given boundaries and meaning to life had been crushed. Furthermore, they were defenseless and surrounding peoples were continually raiding them, adding to their sense of dislocation and confusion.

LIVING IN A STRANGE LAND: THE TRIAL OF EXILE

If we are to find peace at this time in the North American church, we must hear again Yahweh’s word, but hear it from within our liminal place. This means accepting, embracing our marginality. We close this book reflecting on chapters of Isaiah, that are part of a larger reflection on Israel’s plight and Yahweh’s response. At one point, the prophet declares,

But this is a people robbed and plundered, all of them are trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become a prey with no one to rescue, a spoil with no one to say, “Restore!” (Isaiah 42:22).

This summarizes the experience of the exiles. Once a people with a king, a temple, a priesthood, and stable institutions that gave them meaning, they became merely the spoils of war and conquest. What happened? Imagine being an exile. The galling question is this: How could this have happened to us? They were supposed to be a special people, who

believed they were God's chosen. Yet, from all human perspectives, it looked like the gods of Babylon were stronger. It seemed as though Yahweh had failed. Was Marduk of the Babylonians stronger than Yahweh?

Is this such a wild interpretation? Look at their situation. A people whose identity was tied to a story of a God who forged a special people, gave them a covenant, a land, and a special calling as a servant, found themselves in a strange place, far removed from the promises of the covenant. It sure looked like the Babylonian gods were more powerful. Clearly, Yahweh had not been sufficient to defend them against destruction.

Is this not where many of us find ourselves, if we are honest? As we observe the decline of our churches and traditional religious life in North America, does it not seem as though there are other gods stronger than ours? Perhaps, the greatest god today is the god of modernity—a god who says there is no god. Or the god of postmodernity who says all is god; there is no god apart from our own social constructions. Either way, both of these appear to have won the day, pushing those who still hold their Christian faith tradition to the sidelines, where, at best, our beliefs are considered quaint, but unnecessary.

Let's personalize this a bit. We assume that those reading this book are leaders who work at some level with the church. Our task, as leaders, is to assist our churches in this time. Yet, an insidious evil is at work in many of us, eating away at our hearts. It manifests itself as a small internal voice that says we are witnessing the end. The era of traditional belief and the institutions shaped around that belief are collapsing. We fear there is nothing else after the end of what is passing away. We know this eats at some of us because we have been told as much in our conversations with church leaders. For other leaders, it manifests itself in the battle to hold back depression. Still others struggle with endless cynicism. Anticipating the question of Yahweh's weakness as the explanation, the prophet continues asking questions.

Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk and whose law they would not obey? So he poured upon him (Jacob) the heat of his anger and the fury of war... (Isaiah 42:23-24).

Why were they exiles? Why were they sitting in Babylon? Well, it is not that Yahweh was weak and Marduk was strong. It was that they turned against their God. In response, Yahweh allowed them to experience judgment at the hand of the Babylonians. The prophet provided an

interpretation of their situation in light of the covenant and based upon the assumption of Yahweh's Lordship over all human activities.

The Hope of Homecoming

THIS IS NOT THE END of the story. Yes, we are in a strange, marginal place. Yes, Yahweh has dealt with us because of our sin, but there is more. Our experience of exile is not the end of the story. Our time in liminal space is not our destination. There shall be a homecoming.

*But now thus saith the Lord
 he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
 Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
 when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you.
³ For I am the LORD your God,
 the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
 I give Egypt as your ransom,
 Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
⁴ Because you are precious in my sight,
 and honored, and I love you,
 I give people in return for you,
 nations in exchange for your life.
⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 and from the west I will gather you;
⁶ I will say to the north, "Give them up,"
 and to the south, "Do not withhold;
 bring my sons from far away
 and my daughters from the end of the earth-
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
 whom I created for my glory,
 whom I formed and made." (Isaiah 43:1-7)*

GOD CREATED YOU, SO FEAR NOT

The text turns from the reason for exile to hope. Countering their anxiety over displacement and uncertainty, Yahweh reminded them of who had created them. Twice, the prophet made this assertion. Of course, such a command demands a rationale for the people. What do you mean,

do not fear? Look around, things are not good. Yahweh, however, building upon the fact that he created them, also pointed out that once before they had been redeemed from slavery. Yahweh had called them by name. Yahweh had addressed them, had called them forth from Egypt. They belonged to Yahweh.

This is a bold assertion of God's sovereignty. It does not matter to Yahweh what is going on around them or what the nations think about their own strength and power and that of their gods. God had formed and redeemed Israel. They were Yahweh's people. On that basis, he tells his people not to fear—regardless of what seems to be occurring.

ENTERING THE ORDEAL OF LIMINALITY

In reality, the Israelites were going through a liminal experience. Every aspect of their faith was being tested. Two images of passing through a difficult ordeal are helpful—the fear of deep waters and consuming fire. Both are images of trying times: all that was, is no longer. The structures that gave order to life were gone. They had entered an in-between place. Yahweh does not deny this. Indeed, Yahweh embraces the reality by declaring his intent to be with them in that place. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” Do not fear this time, this place. Yahweh does not promise to avoid the place. They will pass through it, but they will not go alone. After all, their God is Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, their savior.

A CHANGE IS ON THE HORIZON

Though the hour looks dark, the prophet declared a change emerging on the horizon. Earlier in Isaiah, the prophet had introduced Cyrus, of Persia, who was moving east and west capturing lands. Up to this point, commentators tell us, he had not given much thought to Babylon for it was too weak. Palestine was inconsequential. Egypt was another matter. The prophet assumed he would not be able to resist the temptation to capture Africa—which his son, Cambyses, eventually did.

Our interest is not the political map making of ancient kings, but the Prophet's interpretation of world events and power movements. He casts all of this in the service of Yahweh's plans. Yahweh is sovereign over all nations. In this case, the prophet insisted that Yahweh intended to exchange Egypt and environs for Israel. For a defeated people whose belief in the power of their God was in question, this was a powerful statement. Babylon's god was not stronger. Yahweh chooses whomever he will to

accomplish his purposes. Even the King of Persia was conscripted for Israel's redemption. God calls servants from anywhere to do his will.

YOU ARE PRECIOUS, SO FEAR NOT!

Why will Yahweh do this? Why will there be an exchange of one people for another? Quite simply, God's people are precious. God loves his people, the people created by God's own hand and redeemed from prior trials. This is the pivotal verse. It all revolves around this one point. Though you suffer the shame of your exile, God honors you. Though you feel insignificant, a mere throwaway in the large scheme of the world, you are precious to God. Though you feel rejected, Yahweh loves you deeply. That you must pass through this marginal space does not change this deep and fundamental reality. This is God's statement, his promise, his character. It is not a hope of the people. It is not dependent upon their getting it right. It is the core reality out of which their experience must be interpreted. Previously, they were not to fear because God had acted once before to redeem them from slavery. This time the call not to fear—even through this transitional place—is because God is with them.

THERE WILL BE A HOMECOMING

Furthermore, this liminal place is not the end. There will be a homecoming. From east and west, north and south, Yahweh will re-gather God's people. This did, in fact, occur. The re-gathering was partial and it did not at all look like what had been. In the restructuring, Israel was never again a politically independent people; however, they came back with a fundamentally re-shaped understanding of their identity, having passed through the dark place of exile.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL HAVE TO DO WITH US?

How do we find ourselves in this story? We find ourselves in this story as a people who believe they are God's people, in a place where it does not look like God is most powerful after all.

Consider again that little church in Chicago where redevelopment means filling the pews and paying the bills. That little church is in exile. Its structures are failing, its world is confusing, and it is frightened. Has God failed? Has our story been a fairy tale? Is this the end of us? Each one of us confronts this story in our churches. Indeed, some of us get up in the morning and wonder the same thing.

We believe there is a powerful word for us here. It runs counter to

the temptation to conclude that all is lost, that the effort is over and that there is nothing on the other side. Yes, we are going through a dying experience, but we do not go alone. The faith challenge for many of us is whether we will hold on to this or succumb to the unbelief that tugs at our hearts. Will we believe the underlying message of the prophet that Yahweh is, in fact, Lord of all? Will we believe that nothing occurs in this world outside God's purposes? This is not a rigid determinism. It is simply a statement of God's overall sovereignty. Within the contingent universe God created which allows many less-than-positive permutations, God is still God, and this is still God's world. God will accomplish God's purpose.

More specifically, what is the message of this text for those of us working in congregations at the end of the Christendom era in North America? How does it help us finish the shift from a stable world to a Transition world? Brueggemann warns against the attempt to derive great universal truths from such texts. They are, in fact, exceedingly particular and one can develop some dangerous ideas by attempting to make general statements from them. Rather, he advises us to let these texts stand in their particularity and as real experiences of real people trying to make sense out of their life experience. What do we share in particular with them? We have lost our place. We share the loss of our traditions and institutions. We share the pressure to lose faith in God to those gods of the surrounding culture. We share the temptation to despair that this transitional place is all there is.

Equally, we share the affirmations of this text with the exiles of old.

- God created the church by the Holy Spirit.
- At the core of our story is the ultimate act of redemption. It is the exchange of Jesus for us on the cross, the ultimate act demonstrating how precious we are to God.
- The promise of God to always walk with us through the dark places is ours as well.
- Finally, we share in the hope of the great homecoming when God shall gather God's people from east and west, north and south. Is not this what we celebrate around the Lord's table?

As we close this book on leading within Transition, our hope is that you will go forth into this transitional time as leaders who understand a changing world. We have entered a liminal place, personally and collectively, as the church gathered in thousands of places around North

America. A known world is passing. Leaders must be willing to lead within and through the Transition. That is where we are!

There is much to do, to finish this era well. There is more to leading in this time of Transition than simply declaring we are in Transition. We must help our churches process what is fading away, and find creative and graceful ways of recognizing the end. At the same time, we must allow the poets and prophets to emerge to stimulate our imagination of the future. No other generation of leaders can do this, but those currently alive in the church. It is a task fraught with peril. We do not go forth alone. Yahweh has promised to be with God's people, even as they pass through the ordeals of water and fire. Yahweh has also promised that this liminal place is not the end. It is an in-between state. The uncertainty that currently pervades the church will pass eventually. We will discover a new way to be the people of God in this culture. It may not happen within our lifetimes, but it will happen. With the promises of Isaiah, we can declare with great boldness our uncertain/certain future. As leaders, it is our task to assist God's people in moving through this. There is clarity in overwhelming ambiguity. We know, in general, where we need to go, and we know God goes with us. We do not know what lies ahead around the bend and up into the clouds. Like Abram, we move forward toward a place even though we do not know where we are going (Hebrews 11:8).

*¹⁶ I will lead the blind
by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them (Isaiah 42:16).*

This awesome challenge need not discourage us. We may find ourselves more spiritually and emotionally energized than we have been for some time. The directional clarity that is emerging, even if the road is not fully clear and the path somewhat obscured, gives us great hope and a desire to engage fully.

So, let us go forth, boldly, finishing well the business that lies behind us, while committing to a strong start for a new era of God's work in this world.

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