

## **The Current Flux of Leadership and Emergent Church Models in the USA and Their Transmission Globally**

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This essay was presented at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, World Missions Briefing, May 2004, Oxford, England.

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### **THE LEADERSHIP INDUSTRY IN THE USA**

Leadership studies and the publications that ensue are a huge industry in the USA. One only needs to access *amazon.com* and do a search under the keyword leadership to see that approximately 71,000 entries are available. Additionally, *amazon.com* offers 200,000 entries if you search under the keyword “management.” Allowing for significant overlap does not diminish the fact that leadership related books and resources are readily available.

As with much in American life, topical fads are evident, and church leaders strain to keep up with the latest angle on leadership to make sure they are deemed “current” and their effectiveness in tune with the latest measurements. Such titles as *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, *Leadership Jazz*, *Leadership Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*, *Monday Morning Leadership*, *Good to Great*, *The Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus* demonstrate the wide variety of resources available.

The American propensity for the creation of popular culture and its accessories is personified in the 2001 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) investigation of the consumerist forces that shape the image consciousness and purchasing predispositions of teenagers in the USA. Their significant study, “The Merchants of Cool,” posited that the current tendency to

define generations in distinct groups such as Boomers, Busters, Gen-X and Millennials was not so much the function of cutting edge social science research as it was sophisticated consumer branding. PBS argued that the “tribalization” that seemingly separated generations was merely a highly effective method of defining the market and maximizing the sales to that niche market.<sup>1</sup>

The reality is that popular leadership studies in the USA have followed suit, and the massive availability of leadership/management resources testifies to a self-perpetuating attempt to respond to the cultural shifts so deeply influenced by the consumerist predisposition of American society. We are engaged in a presidential campaign that will be hotly contested and very well could end up in the kind of deadlock we experienced in 2000. The leadership of large corporations like Enron, MCI and Arthur P. Andersen have attempted, but failed, to remove themselves from accountability for their corporate deception. As a result, the public has cast their scorn broadly on organizations of any kind, including the ecclesial types. The tragedy with priests and sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church is another occasion for the larger public to wonder aloud if Christian leaders are not even more dangerous than the Enron con artists whose efforts have destroyed countless careers and stockholders.

The question for us in this symposium is: *What effect does all this malaise have on leadership for the church in the USA and how actively or passively might that impact the majority world?*

**THE NEW DESIGN OF CHURCH AND SHIFTING LEADERSHIP ROADMAPS IN THE USA**

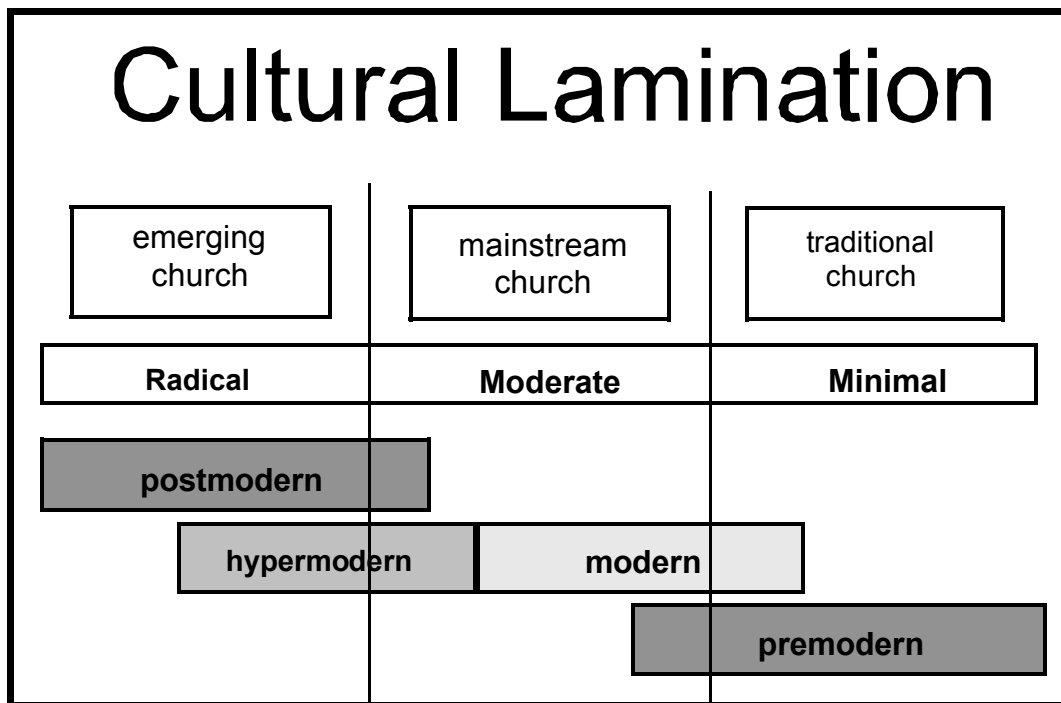
Dee Hock, the founder of VISA, has observed that when our interpretive framework conflicts with changing realities, we can respond in at least three ways:

- Cling to an old framework and impose it on a new reality
- Engage in denial and pretend the external changes are not really profound
- Attempt to understand and change our internal mode of reality (which can be terrifying, not to mention extremely difficult)<sup>2</sup>

Whatever interpretive framework a person may choose, we face exponential adjustments in our world that are mind-boggling. The taxonomy offered by Dee

Hock certainly reflects the way in which the church in the USA has responded to the cultural shifts that are occurring. Our DNA of individualism and consumerism is embedded in the nation’s fabric. Both scholarly and popular sources offer snapshots describing the current realities in the USA that churches attempt to address in various ways. Catholic scholar John Dominic Crossan posits, “There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is the sea.” British film star Hugh Grant offers a keen description of the forces that shape the American scene: “I don’t believe in truth. I believe in style.” In the context that Crossan and Grant offer their observations, the American church labors.

Regardless of Christian tradition, some common denominators reflect various churches’ response to the cultural shifts. This observation of the church in the USA has a multi-layered texture (and may describe more than just the USA).



The options that Hock has offered match the initial layer of the diagram.

- **Traditional** church—Cling to the old framework and impose it on new realities
- **Mainstream** church—Engage in denial and pretend external changes are minimal
- **Emerging** church—Attempt to understand and change our internal mode of reality

The second layer of the diagram reflects discontinuity with the past.

- **Traditional** church—minimal discontinuity
- **Mainstream** church— moderate discontinuity with the past, expressing variations primarily focused on methodology and style
- **Emerging** church—radical discontinuity with the past such that ancient is now future

The final layer of the diagram denotes epistemological assumptions

- **Pre-modern**—I believe therefore I see
- **Modern**—I see therefore I believe
- **Hypermodern**—More is better, slick is cool, consuming is an inalienable right
- **Post-modern**—I don't see or believe. I'm on a raft and I am still unhappy<sup>3</sup>

American Evangelicals have responded in particular ways to current challenges and emerging realities. Robert Webber chronicles both the historical development of current “brands” of evangelical leadership by a taxonomy including traditional, pragmatic and younger evangelicals.

### THE CYCLES OF TRADITIONAL, PRAGMATIC AND YOUNGER EVANGELICAL HISTORIES

	Traditional Evangelicals	Pragmatic Evangelicals	Younger Evangelicals
Era of Origin	Modern Post-World War II Era (1950-1970)	Revolution of the Sixties (1970-1980)	Postmodern, Post 9/11 Era (2000-?)
Organized	1970-1980	1980-1990	
Institutionalized	1970-1990	1990-2000	
<p>Evangelical groups follow a cycle of birth led by charismatic leaders. Each new movement follows the pattern of becoming organized and eventually institutionalized. Later, a new group breaks from the parent group, and the cycle begins again. The younger Evangelicals represent the first new cycle of the twenty-first century. Older cycles continue to exist and minister, generally with decreasing effectiveness. Many sub-groups exist within evangelicalism, but the traditional, pragmatic and younger Evangelicals represent the main voices of evangelicalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup></p>			

Webber’s thorough description of younger Evangelicals includes a comparison of how his taxonomy addresses the issue of church and mission. In such a taxonomy, the descriptions provide clarity on how

American Evangelicals are struggling with models of leadership and church that will be biblically faithful and contextually communicative.

## APPROACH TO THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

	<b>Traditional Evangelicals</b>	<b>Pragmatic Evangelical</b>	<b>Younger Evangelicals</b>
What is the Church?	Church is a place for private faith	Church is a place to meet everyone's needs	Church witnesses to the <i>Missio Dei</i> by word and deed
What Does the Church Do?	The church serves culture as its religious voice	The church reaches out to the seeker	The church is a new creation, a vision of the <i>eschaton</i> in a broken world
How Does the Church Function?	The church is a guide for moral behavior	The church is a place to repair humanity	The church functions as a counter-cultural community
Who Runs the Church?	Professional clergy	A business model of hierarchical leadership	Clergy and people are united in common ministry
How Does the Church Help People Connect with the World?	Provides resources to enable people to minister to others	Consumer mentality. There is something for everybody Meets needs	The church embodies the reality of the new creation
How Does the Church Change?	Change occurs incrementally	Change reflects culture Management principles "Church growth"	Change reflects the nature of the church's mission Spirit-driven change <sup>4</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MAJORITY WORLD

This cursory description of the current state of church and leadership in the American context is minimalist at best. To offer comprehensive analysis of the unique dimensions representative in all traditions would be nigh unto impossible (not to mention presumptive on my part). However, the juxtaposition between current events in a local culture and their impact on spiritual leadership is nothing new. The Bible is replete with examples of how blindness to current models of leadership, painfully dominated by contextual realities, cripple the potential of Kingdom leadership. Jesus' dialogue with his disciples in Mark 10:35-45 is a glimpse into a startling level of cluelessness. When Jesus suggests that the disciple's perception of leadership models worth emulating is lacking, he offers them

an alternative connected to his redemptive mission. The disciples' dialogue in this passage clearly indicates they are products of the leadership models they have observed and are fully committed to actualizing these in their lives on behalf of the "cause." They are participants in a peasant culture that has experienced hundreds of years of conquest by different invaders. They long for freedom and believe that such freedom will be gained by a champion who will defeat an unjust system and the leaders who perpetuate it. Yet the models of leadership with which they have experience predispose them to believing that military might and positional dominance will serve them well. Jesus' simple statement, "Not so with you" (Mark 10:43a) must have seemed as if it were from another planet.

This brief glimpse into Jesus' disciples and their understanding of what it means to be a leader in the Kingdom is a microcosm of what Christian leadership globally faces today. The observation of the Brazilian political and educational activist Paulo Friere further describes this dangerous dilemma when he says, "If to be is to be like, then to be is to be like the oppressor."<sup>5</sup> In other words, if you are limited to the models of leadership most observable in your context and uncritically believe them to be the standard worthy of your emulation, you are bound to replicate them in an increasingly counterproductive manner. For better or worse, cultural and ecclesial models largely frame the initial mental roadmaps of leadership. The position or status we try to achieve, through aspiring to effective mastery of these models, may actually short-circuit our effectiveness from a Kingdom perspective. Alternative leadership models that are formed in reaction to the liabilities found in current models have a long history of being shortsighted and self-serving. Here is where an uncritical absorption of American church strategies and leadership priorities can be most debilitating.

The posture that the church and the culture in the USA are discontinuous with the majority world is a position I would humbly ask you to reconsider. In addition, for the majority of the world merely to lament over our long history of exporting church toxicity, could be debilitating to the sovereign work of the Spirit of God globally. The much-heralded volume by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, confirmed to the academic and journalistic world what missiologists have been saying for a decade. The church's center of gravity has moved from North to South.<sup>6</sup> The emerging leadership of the global church must meet his new and exciting reality with a proactive response to its emerging Spirit-bestowed responsibility.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE SOUTH TO NAVIGATE IN ITS NEW LEADING ROLE

### A Global Youth Culture

MTV has played a huge role in creating a global village and an increasingly homogenous youth culture. Similar brand names are worn and coveted worldwide. However, viewing MTV as merely the purveyor of crass American ideals seriously underestimates its power. Media critic Mark Miller observes that the MTV machine listens to youth carefully. When corporate revenues depend on being ahead of the curve, you have to listen. You have to know exactly what they want and are thinking so that you can give what you want them to have. The task is not to come up with new forms of music. The MTV machine tunes in so it can figure out how to pitch what Viacom (MTV's owner) has to sell to those kids. MTV studies the young, keeping them under very tight surveillance, to figure out what will push their buttons. They take that and blare it back at the kids relentlessly and everywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Global urbanization only heightens the challenges the church in the South will face. Rural village life is no longer a place to hide. Where there is a generator there will be electricity that will power a video player that will sell the child in the most rural setting the idea that the acquisition of a certain brand of clothing will bring him or her respectability and identity. The culprit is not merely the American pop star's crass sexuality, but the reduction of every viewer into an object of focused marketing. As it has been in North, the challenge in the South is how the church's mission, empowered by the Spirit, can create the vibrant community where youth find purpose and destiny beyond the consumerist appeal of MTV's powerful and increasingly global influence. Do not take this growing challenge lightly. Community can no longer depend on tradition, ethnicity, nationality, gender or age. The consumerist impulse, which the media can so easily purvey, challenges the

church to dig deep into spiritual resources previously unexplored.

### **Critique of Local Leadership Assumptions.**

Much of the literature about organizations and leadership is in English, and no small part of that is American. The translation of American leadership books into other languages can be only minimally helpful. The primary provision of such literature is a motivation to understand the nature of leadership and church-related leadership in particular. As American church leadership has struggled to respond to twenty-first century challenges, so will Christian leadership globally. Understanding organizational history and culture is necessary. Critiquing the limitations of preferred local models of leadership is crucial. The venerable Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede has provided seminal research by which common denominators of leadership across cultures can be the foundation for serious Christian critique on preferred local leadership models.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a recent publication by Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington entitled *Culture Matters* provides invaluable international perspective on the inhibitors and provocateurs of effective leadership globally. Of particular usefulness is Argentine economist Mariano Grondona's taxonomy of cultural factors shaping leadership. While aimed at the business world, his insights are invaluable to understanding culture's tight connection to effective leadership.<sup>9</sup> We cannot legitimize church leadership merely by saying, "This is the way we do it" in Botswana, Malaysia or Uruguay. The stakes are too high and the responsibility of our destiny as God's redemptive community is too crucial for the blunting of Kingdom leadership by non-attention to the barnacles of culture's deterrents to representing Christ fairly.

### **Signs of Organizational Dilemma.**

Dilemmas reflective of organizational maturation inevitably affect our attempts to

communicate the dynamic of the gospel across cultures and generations, over a protracted period of time and through periods of social change. Sociologist Thomas O'Dea has provided a helpful taxonomy of five organizational dilemmas that are increasingly obvious as a church organization gets older. This is most notable in five specific organizational dilemmas that become increasingly obvious with the age of an organization:

- The dilemma of *mixed motivation*. As focus changes through the years, single-mindedness of purpose characteristic of early devotees is replaced by professionalism.
- The dilemma of *administrative order*. With the tendency of a structure to over elaborate itself, the organization becomes an unwieldy machine. Once purposeful structures solidify and refuse to change.
- The dilemma of *power*. Religious leaders struggle to avail themselves of the close relationship between religion and general cultural values in order to reinforce the position of religion itself.
- The dilemma of *delimitation*. The inevitability of growing older as a movement and running the gauntlet between "translating" the original message and holding a rigid position kills the spirit of the movement.
- The dilemma of *symbolism*. Leaders try to objectify the original charismatic moment in stable forms and procedures with routinization. How does spontaneity rule when we have moved beyond the incipient stage, first-generation experience?<sup>10</sup>

### **FINAL OBSERVATIONS**

My observations have obvious limitations. I am the president of the Assemblies of God's only seminary in the USA. The Assemblies of God is a 90-year-old organization whose growing edges (in the USA) are primarily among immigrant communities. We are aging, and leadership is facing significant

challenges that are rooted in obviously different generational perspectives about church and mission and what models of leadership can keep us on mission in the twenty-first century.

I am also keenly aware that central to our identity as an organization has been our missionary efforts globally. However, the object of our missionary efforts has increasingly become our partner in mission enterprise. The Assemblies of God is at least 12 times larger outside the USA than within our borders. (We claim 3 million adherents in the USA.) “Partnership” cannot be a safe word for patronization. The center of gravity has changed, not only in the Assemblies of God, but also in the Church universal. The challenges we have faced in the USA are not, nor will they be, exclusive to our experience. The sovereign move of God worldwide will only quicken the necessary movement of the church in the South to assume helmsmen responsibilities. Definitive awareness of the Holy Spirit’s role in strengthening the church for twenty-first century challenges is not the exclusive domain of my Christian tradition. However, when I speak from the bottom of my heart about the redemptive mission to which I have committed my life, I am most comfortable in speaking the “dialect of Pentecost.”

The redemptive process that restores the life-giving nature to church organizations/structures gains empowerment through a fullest understanding of the power of Pentecost. Pentecost is central to the fullest revelation of God’s mission in Jesus Christ. At Pentecost, we are oriented to the inner logic of God’s incarnational manifestation in the world through Jesus Christ. At Pentecost, we experientially encounter the eschatological vision of redemption for the world through Christ’s

presence and coming. That indwelling power of the Spirit of Christ is the source of the church’s life and ministry. The Holy Spirit reveals the fullest redemptive purpose of God’s mission by commissioning us into His ongoing redemptive ministry.<sup>11</sup> Ray Anderson powerfully summarizes this key element of redeeming church structure by saying, “When the church baptizes persons into the mission of Christ, rather than merely into the body of Christ, spiritual empowerment becomes mission strategy.”<sup>12</sup> The church *that is* the empowering return of God’s presence creates an eschatological people that *does what God is* through participation in the redemptive mission of God and *organizes what it does* by allowing spiritual empowerment to define its mission strategies.

Leadership, and the structures through which they work, may have a culturally informed fabric, but connectedness to Christ’s redemptive missions must take prominence. The twenty-first century dawned with a significantly different world Christianity than was present at the dawn of the twentieth century. To steward Kingdom ministry for the twenty-first century, the new center of balance in the South will face contemporary but recurring challenges. Karl Barth suggested three guidelines by which leaders (in any culture) might evaluate the pathways/structure by which they facilitate ministry in Christ’s name. Structures are valid so long as they (1) facilitate ministry based on divine gifts and endowments, not arbitrariness and self-will; (2) build up, not disrupt, the work of the Holy Ghost to build community and (3) facilitate witness to the world in need of redemptive mission. The continuing effectiveness of any church is possible only as we intentionally participate in the release of the gospel’s fullest power.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool)

<sup>2</sup> See Dee Hock, *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> I am in debt to Dr. Earl Creps for his model of the current church scene in the USA. Dr. Creps does some of the most significant work on the emerging church in the U.S. His considerable research can be accessed at [www.agts.edu/faculty/creps.html](http://www.agts.edu/faculty/creps.html). The work of Wade Clark Roof in *Spiritual Marketplace*, (Princeton University Press, 2001) segments the American religious into five subcultures: dogmatic, born-again Christian, mainstream believer, metaphysical believers and seekers, secularists.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>5</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Accessed at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/etc/trl.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/etc/trl.html)

<sup>8</sup> See Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington, eds. *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Processes* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. O’Dea, “Five Dilemmas of the Institutionalization of Religion” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* I, no.1 (Oct 1961): 30-41.

<sup>11</sup> First presented as an address “Unless the Lord Build the House: Eschatology Pentecostal Mission and Life-Giving Organizations” at the Lewis Wilson Institute to Pentecostal Studies at Vanguard University of Southern California, February 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Ray Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline* (Downers Grove: Inter-varsity Press, 1992), 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> Darrel Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 184.