

Power and Process

By Earl Creps

from, *Revival Sermons*, Ken Horn, editor. Springfield, MO: Onward Books, 2000.

The church is undergoing a dramatic transformation. In the midst of this, I see two tribes forming: the revivalists and the strategists. The former sees the ministry as a response to the sovereign intrusion of God; the latter believes it to be the strategic intentions of the congregation. To the revivalist, the church is backslidden and needs repentance. To the strategist, the church is badly led and needs organizational reform. Both are absolutely right.

I want to make a case for a very simple idea: the revival side (I'll call it "power") and the strategy side (I'll call it "process") can and must work together if the church is to rise to its potential.

The devil is not impressed by my leadership team wearing matching polo shirts, or by someone shaking when they receive prayer at our altars. He is impressed by one thing—a church overflowing with the power of God, that also builds the people of God.

These two dynamics are not to be balanced, but merged. Finding the points of contact between these two forces is what I do for a living as a pastor. Power and process complement each other for many reasons. Here is one of them: they have the same friends.

1. Power and process are friends in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2:1-4, the Spirit of God is poured out suddenly and dramatically. A huge crowd gathers and, as a result, Peter preaches an in-your-face message. I mean, this is not seeker sensitive. But instead of running away, 3,000 of them get saved. Now there's the power side. There's the experiential side.

Imagine their first board meeting: "Well, we've grown from 120 to 3,100. What should we do?" And they come up with a really simple plan. "Let's meet in big groups out on the temple court, and in small home groups. Why don't we sing, pray, and talk about what Peter teaches us. We'll love each other and even invite our unsaved friends."

There is the process side. The Early Church instinctively, in its most primitive state, in its first encounter with the Spirit of God, intuitively marries the power side and the process side. And we can cite other examples, but clearly they have the same friends in the Book of Acts.

2. Power and process are friends in the writings of the apostle Paul.

Listen to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 2. "When I came to you, brothers ... my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (vv.1,4, NIV).

There's the Pauline method: unremarkable preaching, much power, great effect. It's the opposite of what you see in a lot of churches. We have great preaching, little power, and almost no effect. "So that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (v.5). Now this guy sounds like he's read John Wimber. It's power encounter evangelism.

The same man writes to the church in Ephesus: "It was he [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians4:11,12).

The man who was saved in two seconds on the road to Damascus is the one who spent two years teaching new converts in Ephesus. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul takes the power side in 1 Corinthians and marries it to the process side, the discipleship side, in Ephesians 4.

3. Power and process are mutual friends in the real world. I'll tell you who in the real world is a friend of both power and process. First, there are the Christians who are just *hungry* for more. They've had it with the ordinary, the status quo church. They are tired of the irrelevance, tired of the powerlessness, tired of going through the motions pretending they make a difference.

Since only three churches in 20 are growing by conversion, I surmise that this constituency is huge. They are waiting for leadership that will put the church on its face seeking the power of God, and get the church on its feet to implement ministry processes that are relevant. These people don't care much about the semantics of the issue; they simply want to live a life that matters for the Kingdom.

The *lost* are a second group that will befriend both power and process. Lots of people are still pre-Christians, as we call them, because they've had it with religion, too. They don't think there's any answer in church-as-usual. They are 100 percent correct.

The lost people in my community do not care what our mission statement says. They care whether we've got answers. Whether something real is happening among us. They don't go to seminars on church management. But they do recognize relevance. And they're going to be reached in the 21st century by the church that marries process and power.

Power and process. They have the same friends—in Acts, in the writings of Paul, and in the real world. But there is a second feature of this merger: They have the same enemies.

1. Power and process have the same enemies in the Book of Acts.

Acts 2 illustrates one form of common resistance—*misunderstanding*. Peter has to open his sermon by explaining the manifestations that accompanied Spirit baptism. “These men are not drunk, as you suppose” (v.15). The amount of misinformation surrounding both revivalists and model-driven scenarios today is simply staggering.

Then there's the enemy of *religiosity*. The city was greatly disturbed, Acts 4:2 says, because the apostles were teaching the Resurrection. The religious people immediately rose up because they felt their hold on the status quo being challenged. They were more in love with their tradition than they were with the new thing that God was doing.

A third common enemy is *exclusivity*. When Paul and others began to welcome the Gentiles into the church, many objected. For example, when the household of Cornelius came to faith in Acts 10, some believers struggled to accept that Gentiles could be saved and filled with the Spirit. The Early Church struggled with reaching out to the Gentiles. And you've heard the same struggle today when Willow Creek is criticized for rumored "ashtrays in the bathrooms" because pre-Christians smoke.

The same type of person will criticize the Brownsville Revival because (by their assessment) the atmosphere in their services is wild. Those who are standing on tradition and insisting on formulaic religion find both sides offensive. The tragedy is that the genuine fruit of relevant ministries is minimized by religious critics who pound away on issues of style, or who simply refuse to accept the move of the Spirit because it did not originate in their camp. Ironically, both revivalists and strategists can be drawn into this sad game.

2. Power and process have common enemies in the life of Paul.

When he visits Cyprus in Acts 13, enemies appear almost immediately. Elymas opposes him, trying to convince the proconsul not to listen to Paul's message. Paul calls on the name of the Lord, and Elymas is struck blind. Power encounter evangelism was resisted in the life of Paul. Yet signs and wonders were a consistent part of his ministry.

He was also resisted in the level of process. Paul goes to city after city to preach. In the course of this he piles up a criminal record that would put him on "America's Most Wanted." He is driven away from the very places in which he wants to disciple new believers. Paul thought the process side was important

enough to require return visits to the cities he had evangelized. Plainly, this was a goal for which he was willing to risk his life.

3. Power and process have the same enemies in the real world. Both of them can be susceptible to the common enemy of *cloning*. That's trying to duplicate someone else's experience in a situation where it has no applicability. The last thing you want is a mail order revival. It will be a fake. And the other last thing you want is a photocopy of someone else's model: "Saddleback Lite." It will be a failure.

They also have the common enemies of *stoning*. People in both camps hurl insults at one another and have insults hurled at them from outside.

A third common enemy is what I would call *morphing*. It's easy for a highly model-driven environment to become a place that simply attracts people on the basis of its culture. You know, preach like a manager; attract managers. The power side can do the same thing. A church that isn't doing process correctly may end up being a refugee camp for Brownsville exiles. In both cases all that's been accomplished is a style change that has produced transfer growth.

It was only crisis experience with God in revival that opened my heart up to work with the process side correctly. The two belong together, individually and corporately. One without the other is incomplete. God, send us Your power. And God, give us wisdom to build a process that grows Your people.

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