TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF ECCLESIAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Abstract

An earlier ethnographic survey of 12 Christian congregations that were largely led, staffed and populated with adults between the ages of 22 and 35, was designed to uncover synergies and strategies that might inform further research among our master and doctoral students in the College of Graduate Studies at Indiana Wesleyan University regarding how efficacious change was implemented in these environs.

This monolith appropriates Van de Ven and Poole’s four-force model of change (Van de Ven and Poole 1995; Poole and Van de Ven 2004) and applies it to changes the early church underwent in the Acts of the Apostles as it grappled with the assimilation of Gentile converts. A five stage process-model for organizational change is proposed with an accompanying suggestion for a theology of ecclesial organizational change.

Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change

Greek Designations For a Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change

A Scriptural predilection for personal behavioral and cognitive change largely overshadows most investigations into the organizational change that a Pharisaic and Diasporic Judaism was undergoing in a transformation into an in situ Messianic community. Laubach points out that this emphasis upon behavioral and cognitive change is evidenced in both Greek and New Testament authors in their proclivity to employ strepho, hapostrepho and strepho in contexts which suggest cognitive and behavioral changes of philosophic and moral perspectives (Laubach 1967:354-355).

A study of Greek literature suggests that morphe might be helpful. Greek writers debated the dynamic “twilight” between reality and form (Plato 1941), and in doing so they employed morphe to emphasize the outward appearance of inner change (Braumann 1967:705-706). Yet, Braumann’s Scriptural examination suggests organizational change is not encompassed in this word’s New Testament usage either (ibid.)

Metanoia might be the most well known word for change, yet it appears rarely in classical Greek literature (Goetzmann 1967:357). This leaves its focus at the mercy of the Septuagint and New Testament writers, where it too carries the force of personal rather than corporate turn in direction (Behm 1964-1974).

However, one word does come into our view carrying the connotation of outward change in appearance with an emphasis upon the form the change evolves through and
This word, a cognate of schema, is meteschematizo and occurs five times in Paul’s writings to the Corinthians and once in his writings to the Philippians. Let us look at each, the later first.

In *Philippians 3:21* the import of meteschematizo is an eschatological outward change in humankind’s appearance, or as Braumann describes “real participation in the glorified body of Christ (Braumann 1967:709). Synergy with outward organizational change is not fostered here, but rather an emphasis upon eventual and outward personal change (Ladd 1981:563-564).

In *1 Corinthians 4:6* Paul warns his skeptics that he applies (meteschematisa) certain constrictions to his outward teachings, because of his desire to be a faithful and trustful servant of Christ’s message (1 Corinthians 4:2). Braumann points out this connotes a thoroughness in transformation (Braumann 1967:709), while Scheider suggests here also lies an emphasis upon an outward appearance that is not the “expected or customary form” (Schneider 1964-1974:958). While this is closer to a description of organizational transformation into an unexpected form, meteschematisa here is applied personally and not corporately. Yet, the use of the term to describe unexpected or uncustomary outward changes in appearance that are due to inner enthuses will be suggested later to describe organizational change in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 contains the remaining instances of meteschematizo where the word is employed by Paul to describe a fallacious appearance of false apostles. The NIV describes this as a “masquerade,” while the NASB and RSV employ the less animated “disguise.” Yet, the usage here retains an external emphasis based upon an inner adjustment, but again applies it personally rather than corporately.

A scouring of theological summaries provides limited analysis of organizational change beyond the above understandings. And thus we find tantalizingly useful words, but not applied to the organizational transformations we seek to discuss in this monolith. Subsequently, an analysis of New Testament history, especially as reflected in Luke’s writings of the *Acts of the Apostles* (an intentional delimitation to ensure this discussion is not unwieldy), can provide an understanding of the forces for change and resultant processes employed under the unction of the Holy Spirit within the early church to organizationally transition from a Jewish sect into a widespread force for altruism, faith and change.

Scholarly Discussion of a Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change

A Scriptural focus upon personal change may have resulted in ecclesial organizational change receiving less than adequate analysis among theologians. A search of American Theological Library Association (ATLA) databases provides less than a handful of journal articles on a theology of change. And, most investigate the personal, cognitive and behavioral change that humans undergo, rather than corporate change. A few however, bear mentioning.

Ellen Charry posits an interesting contribution to her reflections upon Jurgen Moltmann’s work, titled “Reviving Theology in a Time of Change” (Charry 1996). Though designed to address the task of theology in the elastic world of postmodernity, she none-the-less argues for new workings in theology while hinting at the importance of studying the dynamic tension between theology and changing contexts. Charry opens the
door for more study on the synergies created when contextual change intersects theology. She leaves the reader standing with the door ajar, perhaps wishing her reader or students to cross the threshold. However, her contribution is not just in the observation that contextual change is a force unfairly neglected in theology inquiry, but also in her conclusion that postmodern generations eschew broad systemizations in favor of fluid and elastic understandings where change serves as a force to be reacted to and embraced (Charry:118).

In a similar vein, Martyn Percy pens a hopeful “A Theology of Change for the Church” in his contribution to a book on Anglican ecclesial management (Percy 2000). However, the result is a less than satisfying theological apologetic for Anglican polity and practices as responses to change (2000:177-178). A theology of how ecclesial organizational change occurs is not evident, overshadowed by a defense of denominational polity and actions. Nor does a Biblical theology emerge from this discussion, rather Percy tenders an apologetic for Episcopal-based structures and hierarchical controls (2000:177). Not unexpectedly, the result is better labeled a theology of changing (see my upcoming explanation), and still bears greater resemblance to a theology of leadership, with sub-sets of control and administration.

However, it is de Jongh van Arkel who hints at the potential for a theology of change in his insightful article “Understanding Change as Practical Theologian” (De Jongh van Arkel 2001). Though discussing a theology of personal change, he observes that “in theology we often talk about change as if there were little to explain or understand” (2001:31). This tendency to avoid what on the surface seems pedestrian and self-explanatory may also be the malady of any investigation of theology and its relationship to ecclesial organizational change. De Jongh van Arkel argues that “religious change …. is still an open field for research” with a potential to result in a more complex, yet holistic view of humankind and its actions (2001:58). He thus sees a requisite duty of theologians to analyze this theological step-child to elicit “a more informal understanding and theory of change (that) would become part of our basic theories in practical theology” (2001:31). While de Jongh van Arkel is making his arguments largely targeted at crafting a more holistic theology of personal change, the same should be true of the construction of a theology of ecclesial organizational change; where both are subsets of a practical theology.

A contributing factor to what de Jongh van Arkel describes as a modernist neglect of a theology of change, may be because change is a messy, uncharted and muddled arena. It has been observed that a modernist Christendom likes to have its concepts tidy and neatly packaged (Dockery 1995:14-15; Oden 1995:27-31; Grenz 1996:71-81). Yet, postmodernity seems to have no apprehension toward tackling the shadowy-side, of Christian life and community (Whitesel 2006:108-123). Mike Yaconelli penned a book popular among postmodern young people that eschewed Christianity as a nice, codified set of principles, and rather acknowledged it as unclear, ambiguous and even sometimes hazardous to personal mental peace (Yaconelli 2002). Brian McLaren’s summative title, A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/protestant, Liberal/conservative, Mystical/poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian (McLaren 2004) alludes to this multiplicity. Hermann Hesse’s protagonist may have said it best, when he
insinuates modernist man longs for the regimentation of the Middle Ages, by stating “a man of the Middle Ages would detest the whole mode of our present-day life as something far more than horrible, far more than barbarous. Every age, every culture, every custom and tradition has its own character, its own weakness and its own strength, its beauties and ugliness; accepts certain sufferings as matter of course, puts up patiently with certain evils” (Hesse 1957:22).

Subsequently, there may be little hesitation for postmodern thinkers to closely examine and conjecture on the relationships between change, theology and organizational behavior. De Jongh van Arkel’s avoidance hypothesis, is hopefully no longer required by a generation that sees and welcomes both beauty and ugliness in God’s creation, including the church and its theology.

Even over a quarter century ago these tensions were shaping the mind of Michael Ryan (Ryan 1975). While contributing to a volume he edited on The Contemporary Explosion in Theology, Ryan suggests that life-cycle forces are causing a reevaluation of modernist institutions and their beliefs by younger generations (1975:1). Though embracing a postmodernist viewpoint, Ryan does not utilize the term postmodern. Instead he prefers to call for the contemporary theologians bursting upon the scene to contemplate the dynamic tensions inherent in change and craft an understanding (1975:10-16). Due to its inevitability, Ryan encourages that change be embraced by the church, because there are “vital forces and new institutions around them demanding that they change, that they adapt to new conditions of life” (1975:1).

Toward this cultural and theological demand, the remainder of this monolith will seek to inaugurate a discussion. While theologians such as Percy, de Jongh van Arkel, Ryan and others have scratched the surface, it is the hope that this present study will release creative new ideas for theological inquiry, and will enlarge research of ecclesial organizational change and a theology that might inform it.

**Historical Evidence of a Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change**

Few can argue that organizational change does not occur in the Old and New Testaments and that God must have a relationship with and perspective upon it. Both Testaments, as well as Inter-testamental literature are replete with illustrations.

For example, Israel’s organizational change from a tribal existence, into a kinship community, through a Diasporic oppression, and via martial mission to a theocratic confedecacy that transitions into a kingdom that is once again dispersed only to reconvene … indicates that organizational change has been woven into the fabric of the Old Testament chronology.

One short example should suffice here for what could (but shall not) grow into an overly wieldy, if then exhaustive, look at ecclesial organizational change in the Old Testament. It comes from John Howard Yoder, who offers an interesting perspective on reoccurring organizational change, with a resultant suggestion that the contemporary church embrace and adjust into a new structure modeled after the changes the Jewish community underwent at times of Jubilee (Yoder 1994). Yoder sees the period of Jubilee as a pillar of a social justice theology and organizational structure, wherein ecclesial organizational change results in renewal, along with a recalibration similar to Jewish society’s balance between social and military organizational behavior (Yoder: 60-75).
This for Yoder provides an efficacious model for ecclesial organizational structure more befitting theological and altruistic conventions.

Historical Delimitations

As noted above, space and time must constrain our study to some degree. Yet, it is hoped that this initial investigation into a theology of ecclesial organizational change will encourage further researchers to ply this fertile soil and that more efficacious models may emerge.

While many Scriptural narratives lend themselves to an inquiry into God’s intentions for ecclesial organizational change (as noted above), a critical and pivotal narrative containing enough dialogue to offer some extended study would be the Council at Jerusalem’s decision to organizationally accommodate ministry to Gentiles (Acts 15:5-29). The bearing of this conclave upon future ministry strategies also makes it a fitting example for study. Finally, the assimilation and methodological accommodation by Jewish culture toward another culture (Gentile), has parallels with modernity’s cultural engagement with postmodernity.

Theological Delimitations

As the reader can infer from the above, ecclesial organizational change is an outgrowth of inner cognitive/behavioral change, the latter of which is broadly discussed in theological literature.

The resultant complex interrelationship between inner-personal change and inter-personal organizational change is best summed up by E. Stanley Jones in *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Jones 1972). Change dances around the edges of Jones’ reflections and insights, surfacing most noticeably in the sections on the revolution of the kingdom (Jones:121-122) and the resultant revolution in humankind (Jones:164-169). Jones’ import for this discussion is that he emphasizes that both personal-regenerative and organizational-orientated change work from the “inside-out,” rather than in the customary “humanistic ethical” process of outward-in (Jones:164). This means that historical inquiry into a theology of personal change is not unrelated to this study, only beyond its scope. Thus, a theology of personal change is a description of the inner moral journey of humankind that creates outward organizational structures for effectiveness, survival and interconnectedness. This present study due to scope, must delineate out of our inquiry the important foundational understandings of a theology of personal change. Subsequently, this current writer seeks to glimpse God’s intentions for the outward organizational manifestations of inner sanctification.

**The Purpose of This Present Inquiry:**

**Uncovering A Process-Model for Ecclesial Organizational Change**

**As Reflected in the Actions of the Council of Jerusalem**

Toward A Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change in The New Testament
E. Stanley Jones also posits that in the *ecclesia*, both corporately and individually, there are generative change mechanisms that are initiated by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit (Jones:76-77). Thus Jones sees the advance of the church and the proliferation of disciples as moved along by varied “conductive” mechanisms (Jones:169). These conductive mechanisms are what organization theorists would label processes and their depiction a resultant process-model.

Still, the purpose at hand is not to provide added opportunities for bored students of theology to tinker with inter-disciplinary synergies. Rather, this discussion has been initiated because the Church has historically engaged with difficulty the topic of organizational change. I and others have observed this may be the outcome of a Church that has difficulty distinguishing between an unchanging God and His changing methodology (McIntosh 2005; Whitesel 2007). Suffice it to say that for the present discussion, there needs to be a starting place to look at God’s intentions for change forces that act upon and within ecclesial organizations.

As such, this author acknowledges another tactical delimitation. And this is that I agree with Jones, that looking at Holy Spirit imbued actions within the New Testament church can shed theological light on God’s intentions for efficacious organizational change (Jones: 121-122).

**Toward A Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change in The Acts of the Apostles**

John Cobb, scanning the theological horizon and taking his starting place from the writings of Jurgen Moltmann, suggests that future theological inquiry will require a new practical emphasis, which he prefers to call “church theology” rather than the more customary practical theology (Cobb 1996:199). Cobb’s perspective is appealing, for he sees the need for an epistemological as well as pragmatic response to ecclesial quandaries. Cobb suggests a church theology, by this he means “Christian thinking that takes its problems not from the intellectual and scholarly tradition, but from the life of the church” (ibid.).

Similarly, C. H. Cochran’s look at the tensions that emerged between Christianity and culture in the early church concludes that the church in the *Acts of the Apostles* was not influenced by theological inquiry, but rather by social and moral transformations taking place on a personal level with a goal of Christ-likeness (Cochran 1944). In a parallel vein, Lindbeck argues that modernist theology is overly cognitive in orientation, while postmodern theologians prefer an “experiential-expressive” emphasis.

Combining together Cobb, Lindbeck and Cochran’s observations, an investigation into a church theology of ecclesial organizational change that is rooted in the *Acts of the Apostles* seems to offer the greatest potential for eliciting a theology that grapples with both the organizational outflow of cognitive and behavior changes as reflected in experiential-expressive outcomes in organizational culture.

This sense of a practical and Scriptural church theology, birthed in the milieu of contextual tensions appeals to me, as I continue research into how, why and for what reason youthful churches undergo change. This begs a church theology of ecclesial organizational change, and as noted above I have chosen for a suitable context a starting point in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Specifically, this will be the early, post-ascension, church where the Day of Pentecost forebodes a day when the Spirit infused message of
Jesus’ disciples will reach beyond Jerusalem, past Judea and Samaria and *heos eschatou tes ges* (Acts 1:8). It is the push of this ecclesial and spiritual system into Gentile realms and cultures that may give us a glimpse into God’s intentions for ecclesial organizational change that takes into consideration cultural predilections and tensions between modernity and postmodernity.

A Grid Through Which To Analyze Ecclesial Organizational Change:
The Four Force Model of Change

*An Inter-disciplinary Understanding of Change*

Another delimiter, organizational change, seems on the surface self-explanatory, but an expansive literature on this within organization theory necessitates some explanation before examination. The case studies that informed my ethnographic study revealed an ongoing engagement with change among organic congregations (Whitesel 2006). They see it not as a hazard to be surmounted, but as multiple forces to be embraced and molded. In a forthcoming journal article I have developed from this ethnographic research an organization theory of four generative and sustentative forces of change, and proposed an ecclesial adaptation of the Four Force Model (Whitesel 2007) based upon the work of organization theorists Van de Ven and Poole (Van de Ven and Poole 1995; Poole 2004). Each of the case studies in my survey demonstrated a mix of these four forces. A careful analysis of each case study and their matrix in the four Forces Model awaits another opportunity. Suffice it to say for the present discussion that future Church Growth Movement research upon growth and its relationship to change mechanisms and processes, will require as in secular organization theory, a holistic analysis via a Four Force Model

*Grid A: Theories of Change In Lieu of Theories of Changing*

To maintain succinctness in the midst of an exhaustive topic, I shall, as does organization theorists, distinguish between *theories of change* and *theories of changing* (Bennis 1996).

I concur with organization theorists that *theories of change* as those constructs that explain how organizations change and factors that influence that change. And, I consider *theories of changing* those constructs that deal with how change is manipulated and managed to elicit ultimate organizational performance. In a book for church leaders based upon the aforementioned ethnographic survey, I dedicated the first half of each chapter to examining the *theory of change* evident in each case study, then concluded each chapter with three lessons that suggested corresponding *theories of changing* (Whitesel 2006:a).

And thus a final delimitation will be to study *theories of change* that inform a *theology of change*. This will not be a *theology of changing*, for this topic awaits our initial theory generation. It is thus my hope that this study will become the seed bed from which additional research queries regarding theories of changing and a theology of
changing will be germinated and cultivated. Thus, let us begin our inquiry, mindful that our purpose is to uncover a theology of change as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles.

**Grid B: The Four Force Model of Organizational Change**

As mentioned above, the second grid through which our discussion finds form, succinctness and structure is the Four Force Model of Change, espoused by organization theorists Van de Ven and Poole (Van de Ven and Poole 1995; Poole and Van de Ven 2004). While looking at 2000+ articles on theories of change, Van de Ven and Poole identified 20 process theories of change, in which all are comprised of varying mixtures of four forces of change (Poole and Van de Ven 1995:527-532; 2004:7-9). The four forces are described as the following manner.

Life-cycle forces exert upon and move along change because the entity is moving “through a necessary sequence of stages or phases. The specific content of these stages or phases is prescribed and regulated by an institutional, natural, or logical program prefigured at the beginning of the cycle.” (Poole and Van de Ven 2004:7-8). And, these generative forces are a “prefigured program/rule regulated by nature, logic or institutions” (Van de Ven and Poole 1995:514). Here four general stages emerge: Stage 1, start-up; Stage 2, grow; Stage 3, harvest; Stage 4, terminate, followed by a return to Stage 1, start-up. Examples in Church Growth literature include Jenson and Stevens’ church growth barriers (Jenson and Stevens 1981:113-115), Wagner’s ethnikitis and old age maladies (Wagner 1976:42-43, 125-134) and Whitesel and Hunter’s geriatrophy (Whitesel and Hunter 2001:31-33). Examples in the social sciences include Piaget’s child development stages (Piaget 1930, 1932).

The teleological model “views development as a cycle of goal formation, implementation, evaluation and modification of actions or goals based on what was learned or intended by the entity” (Poole 2004:7). Here in Church Growth writings would lie goal-orientated methodologies for change, including McGavran’s theology of harvest (McGavran 1970:30-40), note the appropriately teleological appellation. Social sciences would be represented here by Mead’s anthropological theories (Mead 1970).

In dialectic models of change “conflicts emerge between entities espousing an opposing thesis and antithesis that collide to produce a synthesis which in time becomes the thesis for the next cycle of dialectical progression” (Poole 2004:7). There are numerous tomes within the Church Growth Movement that would fall into this category (c.f. Towns 1997; Langford 1999; Whitesel 2001; McIntosh 2001; Whitesel 2003). Social science theories would include Marx (Marx 1954) and Freud (Freud 1935).

The evolutionary model of development “consists of a repetitive sequence of variation, selection and retention events among entities” (Poole 2004:7). This can also be described as “natural selection among competitors in a population” (Van de Ven and Poole 1995:514). In the Church Growth field these are often theories of change that are somewhat generic in approach, in that while they worked in one scenario are deemed (usually by the initiators) as valid for varied scenarios (Hybels and Hybels 1995; Hurston and Hurston 1997; Comiskey 2005). Among the social sciences Charles Darwin is the prototypical illustration (Darwin 1859).

As noted earlier, theories of change rarely appear singularly, but usually occur as a mixture of forces (Van de Ven and Poole 1995:525-532). Thus, a mutuality and
multiplicity grid emerges where most change processes are comprised of more than one of these theories of change.

**A Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change**

**As Evident in the Acts of the Apostles**

*Luke 24:46-49*


In the Gospel passage, Luke quotes Jesus as emphasizing a soteriological rationale (*24:46-47a*) for the upcoming expansion of his message (*Acts of the Apostles*). To this foundational statement he attaches (*24:47b*) the adverbial phrases *panta ta ethne* and *hapzamenoin apo ‘Jerousalem*. Here anticipation, extension and probability are wed, in the use of *panta ta ethne* and *hapzamenoin*, connoting a broadening that Jesus has certainly earlier hinted (*Luke 13:2-9, 18-21*).

The universal and teleological applicability of the phrase *panta ta ethne* has been critically examined elsewhere (McGavran 1970:41-56; Wagner 1971:21-25; 1981:166-183; McGavran 1988:7-12). Thus, suffice it for the present conversation to say that here is reiterated a broadening of the Messianic mission. In addition, the adding of the phrases *hapzamenoin apo ‘Herousalem* and *kai ego apostello ten epaggelian tou patros mou ephi umas* likewise implies not only a broadening, but also a democratization of the task.

If mission can be defined by missiologists as “God’s program for man” (McGavran 1970:23), then these adverbial phrases become missiological signposts, soon to be expanded in the Holy Spirit’s work among this fledging messianic sect of Judaism and recalled by Luke in the actions of the apostles that will follow.

However, note here that the ritualistic and spiritual center of Judaism, Jerusalem, is selected as the epicenter for this transfer of consecrated power from the Son to the offspring. The significance upon Jewish hearers must not be underestimated. Jerusalem was the familial intersection of Jewish community, religious expression and ritual, as well as political breeding ground. As such, the holistic impact of an *euanggelion* wrapped in expectation and expansion, is that the family of Judaism will expand. Though into *what* exactly is not in this passage signified. Rather, the passage elicits the *when*, with an admonition that the disciples are to *de kathisate en te polei* until imbued with power for their indigenous task (*Luke 24:49b*).

Herein may be seen several generative forces for change. Life-cycle forces are evident in Jerusalem’s selection for context, as no where else in the Ancient Near East would the Jewish life-cycles of religious, social and political forces weigh upon the hearer. Though the proclamation of Jesus’ birth is described in an earlier passage by Luke as occurring in the fields surrounding the ancestral Davidic city (*Luke 2:1-20*), here the locale moves to a penultimate environment of Judaism’s quest for community, safety, power and cohesiveness. Comparisons of these two Jewish locales and their meaning to their inhabitants, offers another glimpse of how life-cycle forces are once again moving,
and this time toward the fulfillment of an Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:3b-d, 15:5) that had been overshadowed by the nation’s quest for survival and power.

Jesus’ forecast of a divine empowerment, *eos ouendusesthe uphous dunamin* (*Luke 24:49b*) imbues this passage with a teleological emphasis. Something is coming, and it is to be anticipated. It is not driven by a dialectic motor, creating synthesis from thesis and antithesis, but rather a teleological promise of a tangible goal foreshadowed in Joel’s prophesy (c.f. *Acts 2:16-21*, and *Joel 2:28-29*).

Because of the divine empowerment required for this teleological task, evolutionary forces are not evident. In evolutionary models, random variation elicits survivability, which results in retention and further variation. The Jewish quest for military survivability and dominance, if it had been successful during its struggles with the Greek and Roman empires (e.g. the Maccabean revolts), could have then resulted in heightened military prowess and expansion. This then could have been evidence of evolutionary motors at work. Yet, the record is contrary.

Instead, the force in *Luke 24:46-49* is an outgrowth of Judaism’s Abrahamic covenant and is imbued at a locale that hints to the importance and culmination of life-cycle forces. The four stages of the life-cycle force model, may be seen in 1a) startup, Abrahamic covenant, 2a) growth, Tribal-Kingdom-Vassal periods, 3a) harvest, Jerusalem centered insurgency and religious intensification, 4a) termination, the Old Covenant, 1b) startup, Messianic Judaism, etc.

*Acts 1:1, 4, 8*

Luke reiterates here for the seeker/lover of God a slightly different variant of the *Luke 24:46-49* passage. *On herzato o Jesous poiein te* (*1:1*) parallels the use of *hapzamenoin* in the earlier passage (*Luke 24:47b*). Again, the life-cycle emphasis noted above emerges in a prominent inaugural verse, and is coupled later in this paragraph with *apo ‘Jerousalem lumon me chorizesthai* (*1:4b*) further highlighting the locale that would have such life-cycle import for the listener. As such, this passage develops and recalls in the hearer’s mind an anticipation for the culmination of God’s promises due to life-cycle forces.

In this inaugural overview, we see life-cycle forces attaining prominence, and preparing the recipients for change rooted in the death (Stage 4: termination) and rebirth (Stage 1: startup) of not just the individual, but of the religious system as well.

Verse 8 also develops the *Luke 24:47b* passage, as *hapzamenoin apo Jerousalem* becomes the expanded *en te ‘Jerousalem kai en pase te ‘Joudaia kai Samareia and eos eschatou tes ges* (*1:8b-d*). As such, the Jewish and/or politically savvy reader is left with the distinct impression of an increasing teleological force for change, that has expansive and universal elements.

Note that these universal elements are gaining further emphasis in the above passages (*Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:1, 4, 8*) as are the life-cycle forces resident in the chosen environs (*Luke 24:47b; Acts 1:4d, 8b-d*). Here we see the silhouette of a theological process model emerging, where life-cycle forces commence a process that then expands in universal applicability and efficacy with teleological overtones.

*Acts 1:21-26*
This passage provides a somewhat unexpected change in course, as the selection of an apostle to replace Judas is considered. The results have been variously interpreted, but one theoretical prospect is that this passage is meant to show the lack of efficacy in hyper-democratization. The resultant apostle, Matthias, is not heard from again, leading to conjecture among some that the intended apostle was a not-as-of-yet converted Saul (see Harrison's refutation of this in Harrison 1975:47-48). Yet, if we reject this premise, the passage seems out of place, even superfluous. In addition, it is neutral to our developing process model. Thus, for the sake of inquiry, let us tentatively accept this argument at face-value and see how this it might contribute to our church theology for ecclesial organizational change.

With this passage accepted (if only for argument) as a warning about over democratizing the change process, we find that it stands nicely juxtaposition against the Spirit-infused process that precedes it in Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:1, 4, 8. If this is Luke’s rationale, then the theological implication may be that mauptura tes anastaseos autou sun emin genesthai eva touton (1:22b) should require a more spiritual force driving the change rather than a seemingly equally balanced spiritual-practical inauguration.

Here a teleological motor is again modestly evident, as Peter appeals to Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 to attain a teleological and apostolic goal, since ouv ton sunelthonton (1:21). The questionable outcome of Matthias’ selection, at least in Luke’s choice of contexts, appears to emphasize a teleological misstep. And though other rationales may be put forth for Matthias’ uninspiring career, due to Luke’s literary selectiveness this interpretation must certainly be entertained.

Acts 2:1-12

The variety of ‘Joudaioi andres eulabeis apo pantos ethnous ton upo ton oupanon (Acts 2:5) recalls and reemphasizes the universal tone of the earlier passages under scrutiny (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:1, 4, 8). The life-cycle forces that we saw emphasized in the locale and religious emphases, are now slightly though increasingly superceded by an environment populated by Jews of mixed heritage (2:9) and ethnicity (2:11). As a result, life-cycle motors and rationales appear to be waning. They are evident, but not as central.

Rather, the result seems to be an emphasis increasingly teleological in nature, where the mandate of panta ta ethne (Luke 47a) begins to be reflected in the assembled throng. The very query this event elicits, Ti thelei touto einai (2:12b), is teleological in import.

Acts 2:14b-47

Peter’s sermon addresses this teleological bewilderment, with a teleological explanation. Peter emphasizes the universality of God’s redemption and empowerment: encheo apo tou pneumatos moue pi nasan sarka (2:17b). And though he chose sarka instead of ethne, the universal and teleological import remains.

Similar teleological emphases are stressed in kai estai pas os ean epikalesetai to ooma kuriou sothesetai (2:21) and umon kai pasin tois eis makran osous (2:39b). And though life-cycle forces of an eschatological fulfillment are evident (e.g. 2:17-21 and
dissatisfaction (2:12b; 37b); 2) followed by search and interaction (2:17-20, 22-24, 29-34a, 36); resulting in a 3) setting and envisioning of goals (2:21, 25b-28, 34b-35); and concluding with implementation of these goals (2:38-41).

Not surprisingly the following paragraph contains the passage describing the four types of church growth (Acts 2:42-47), customarily analyzed within the Church Growth Movement (Whitesel and Hunter 2001:207-218), adding a teleological exclamation point to this discussion.


Yet, life-cycle forces do not disappear entirely. Peter’s sermon in Solomon’s Colonnade commences with a life-cycle appeal to his Jewish listeners (3:11-26). However, Luke follows this with a description of the growing rift of this young Messianic sect with traditional Jewish religionists as exemplified in Peter and John’s treatment before the Sanhedrin (4:1-5). The Sanhedrin’s teleological query, ‘En poia dunamei ne en poio onomati epoiesate touto umeis (4:7b) is answered by Peter with a life-cycle rationale, to which he adds the Psalmic induction: o lithos o ezouthenetheis uphi umon ton oikodomon, o genomenos eis kephialyn gonias (4:11b). Now the rift becomes more pronounced, with Peter’s appropriation of the psalmist’s liturgy that though God remains unchanging (Psalm 118:1-4), he none-the-less undertakes unexpected choices, such as appropriating the builders’ rejected stone to suffice as the capstone (Psalm 118:22-24).

An interesting sidebar that will have bearing on our later discussion, is that the Sanhedrin after initial uncertainty, decided to put what in their minds were logical and minimal teleological constraints upon Peter and John. The council’s admonition, to katholou me phitheggesthai mede didaskein epi to onomati tou Jesou (4:18b) was swiftly rejected by Peter and John (4:19b-20). Yet, in the Sanhedrin’s minds may have offered as much of a compromise as they deemed available.

Subsequent signs of God’s empowerment residing upon the Apostles (5:12-16) unleash further anger and persecution from the Sanhedrin (5:17-26). The result is similar, with the high priest saying paraggelia pareggeilamen umin me didaskei epi to onomati touto (5:28a). However, now is added the embellishment that idou peplerokate ten Jerousalem (5:28b), a sign the gap between the followers of Christ and traditional Judaism is widening.

Even polarization between the diaconia and the Sanhedrin are described as Stephen’s supernatural workings are criticized (6:11-14) and chastised (Acts 7ff). Yet though Stephen appeals to life-cycle rationale for messianic expectations (7:2-50), he concludes with a life-cycle typification, sklerotrcheloi kai aperitemtoi kardiais kai tois osin (7:51), followed by a forceful teleological appeal that oitines elabete ton nomon eis diatagas aggelonm kai ouk ephiulazate (7:53).

Thus here too we see a theological progression in Luke’s narrative, as life-cycle forces continue to provide a basis for teleological arguments, but with an increasingly larger emphasis on the later amid the growing church’s expansion.

The prophesied Samaritan expansion (Acts 1:7), occurs as the fallout from the persecution that commenced with Stephen’s death (Acts 8:1). Encounters with unusual (the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:27-39) and sometimes unacceptable religious practices (e.g. Simon the sorcerer, Acts 8:9-24) led to conversions and conversations regarding the implications of this new spiritual Kingdom that had come upon them. Finally, Saul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-19a) is the capstone example of the regenerative and restorative powers of Christ.

Life-cycle motors increasingly played less of a role, after the conversion of Saul. Saul’s persecution of Christians had not arisen from life-cycle forces, for Luke’s characterization of Saul’s attitude (eti empveon apeiles, 9:1a) and his mission (pros tas sunagogasm opos ean tinas eure tes odou ontas, andras te kai gunaikas, dedemenous agage eis Jerousalem, 9:2:b) betrays a teleological plan to rid Judaism of this divisive sect. And, his appearance in Jerusalem, with a goal of Christian imprisonment, did not ingratiate him to the disciples there (me pisteuontes oti estin mathetes, 9:26d).

The result appeared to be a deemphasizing of life-cycle forces among these converts who possessed either little zealotry (e.g. life-cycle appeal not relevant) or excessive zealotry (e.g. life-cycle appeal not effective). Instead Simon the sorcerer, the Ethiopian and Saul were gauged by their teleological actions and results. Simon pleads for eschatological escape (8:24), the Ethiopian is baptized (8:36-39) and Paul eparresiasato en to onomati Jesou (8:27c). Slowly life-cycle motors are playing less of a role in orientating change within the Messianic organization, and teleological goals and manifestations are gaining prominence.


Looking in hindsight and through a grid of the Four Force Model of Change, it might only seem natural that this waning emphasis upon life-cycle motors and growing influence of teleological motors, might bring these Messianic Jews to a teleological conclusion that God’s time was suitable for the panta ta ethne (Luke 24:47b).

Peter’s educational journey, from vision (Acts 10:11-16) to centurion (10:23b-48) results in this teleological conclusion that Peter delivers to his colleagues in Judea: ei oun ten isen dopean edoken autios o Theos os kai emin pisteusasin epi ton kupion Jesoun Christon, ego tis emin dunatos kolusai ton Theon (Acts 11:17).

Neither the life-cycle emphases of Gentiles in Patristic history, nor evolutionary clashes and wars (e.g. the Maccabean revolt) play a part in the current change in outlook among the fledging church. Rather, teleological emphases are anticipated and expected as testimony to God’s will for change in their organizational (and cultural) outlook.

Acts 11:19-24

Soon disciples oitines elthontes eis Antiocheian elaloun kai pros tous ‘Hellenas, euaggelizomenoi ton kurion Jesoun (11:20b). The teleological result that kai en cheir kuriou met auton (11:21a), provided such a positive teleological outcome to the church at Jerusalem that they send Barnabas to investigate (11:22). In keeping with teleological
forces that are increasingly controlling the process, and seemingly have taken over for life-cycle energies, Barnabas witnesses ten charin tou Theou (v. 22:a).

Perhaps as a result of their outreach to syncretic religionists, hyper-religionists and God-fearers (or all three); the change in organizational outlook to embrace non-traditionalists results in teleological manifestations as a posteriori validation for God’s will.

Acts 13:3-14:28

The first of two missionary journeys by Paul finds him accompanied by Barnabas and initially John Mark (13:2, 13). The journey through Galatia and portions of Pamphylia, Lycaonia and Pisidia results in a significant increase in disciples (14:21) and the appointment (keirotoneo) of presbuterous (14:23a) and parethento autous to kurio (14:23b). Again, Luke’s qualification of the journey’s success is described in teleological terms: appointments, committing and winning.

It is also important to note that here again, supernatural yet dialectic connections via prayer and fasting are a requisite part of the discernment endeavor. This is evidence of a dialectic force, where human will and resultant theses are submitted to divine theses to yield synthesis. To distinguish this from human-to-human dialectic, I will call this divine-to-human dialectic forces.

Acts 15:1-29

A result of these various spiritual encounters, Gentile reception (especially among god-fearers) and wide-ranging expansion of the ecclesia, was the need for a summit to address the issues of Christ and culture (15:1-29). Before we seek to determine a process model for change herein, we must understand what change is being considered.

The dynamic tension between Christ and culture is of interest not only to missiologists, but also to theologians. Richard Niebuhr in his treatise Christ and Culture suggested that there are several ways to look at Christ’s interaction with culture (Niebuhr 1951:45-229).

First there is “Christ against culture” a view embraced by the early church father Tertullian. In this view culture is seen as evil, thus requiring Christians to withdraw and insulate themselves, resulting in a monastic response. Charles Kraft exposes three fallacies in this view, demonstrating it is not in keeping with Paul’s view that “nothing is unclean of itself” (Romans 14:14) (Kraft 1996:105-106).

A second view is labeled by Niebuhr “Christ of culture” and was embraced by early Gnostic heretics. They interpreted Christ through cultural trends, rejecting any claims of Christ that conflicted with their culture (Niebuhr 1951:45-229). Counter to this, Isaiah 55:8 reminds us that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, or our ways his ways.

Another view Niebuhr called “Christ above culture” which he divided into five sub-categories. However, for this discussion only three are required. The reader seeking more exhaustive insights will benefit from a careful exploration of Kraft’s analysis of Niebuhr (Kraft 1979:108-115).
“Christ above culture in synthesis” was held by Thomas Aquinas and views Jesus as the restorer of institutions of true society. This view believes that Christianity will someday completely transform culture, perhaps into a millennial peace.

In another sub-category, “Christ above culture in paradox,” Christ is seen above but in such tension with culture that a messy, muddled relationship results. Martin Luther grappled with this perspective, as did modern writer Mike Yaconelli who labeled this “messy spirituality.” Popularizing the term *messy spirituality* in his book by the same name (Yaconelli 2002), Yaconelli’s assessment has been popular among postmodern Christians. Young people often saw in his perspective one more in keeping with their untidy journey towards discipleship. To understand the angst and anxiety many young people sense today between their Christian understanding and their vacillating demeanor, see Yaconelli’s insightful volume. Yet, this perspective, while bringing a degree of much needed authenticity and transparency to Christianity, lends little insight in how to deal with culture. It simply acknowledges that culture is there and that no explanation will be forthcoming. Since this present monolith seeks to explain and analyze the forces resident in Christ’s engagement with culture, we must delimitate out this perspective from any attempt to craft a theology of change.

Another sub-category is “Christ above but transformer of culture.” Embraced by Augustine, John Calvin and John Wesley this view sees culture as corrupt but convertible (Kraft 1979:113). Kraft built upon this a position called “Christ above but working through culture,” explaining that “God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people” (1979:114). Eddie Gibbs further elaborates that “such an approach represents a deliberate self-limiting on the part of God in order to speak in understandable terms and with perceived relevance on the part of the hearer. He acts redemptively with regard to culture, which includes judgment on some elements, but also affirmation in other areas, and a transformation of the whole” (Gibbs 2005:92). In this view strategic intentions must not conclude simply with investigating and examining culture, but also must continue through sifting and judging its elements. Here the prudent communicator must make qualitative judgments based upon Scripture, ethics, personal belief and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The end result of this examination or sifting, must be a rejection of elements in conflict with Christ, but also an affirmation of those elements that are not so. In the ensuing narrative from Acts 15:1-29 it will become evident that the “Christ above but transformer of culture” position could readily describe the actions of the Jerusalem Council.

The impetus for the convening of such an assembly, are the actions of Judaizers who travel to Antioch, the focal point for the burgeoning ministry of Paul and Barnabas (15:1). Their message was clear, salvation depended upon adherence to circumcision to *ethēi to Mouseos* (15:1d). Thus is evident the forces of change of the life-cycle model. The Judaizers, rather than seeing the life-cycle forces at stage 4 (termination) with impending renewal (stage 1) as do Peter (Acts 2:17-21) and Paul (Acts 9:22), the Judaizers view the life-cycle forces at Stage 3 (a harvest of Gentiles into Judaism).

The process is likewise moved along by teleological forces, albeit physical ones, as the Judaizers’ goals are to affect visible soteriological signs (circumcision) upon the new converts. There is little indication of human-to-human dialectic forces at play. The issue seems non-negotiable in both the appeal of the Judaizers to Patriarchal
Paul and Barnabas’ reactions are more clamorous that might be expected, Luke describing it de staseos kai zeteseos ouk oliges (15:2a). The intensity of Paul and Barnabas’ reaction can most likely be attributed to the views held by them and the divergence from those held by the Judaizers. Let us conjecture that Paul and Barnabas held a “Christ above but transformer of culture” perspective, and as such saw circumcision as part of the cultural milieu “in which humans are immersed as the arena of his (God’s) interaction with people” (Kraft 1979:114). Thus, this milieu might require in Paul and Barnabas’ minds a parallel action to what Gibbs would describe in God as “a deliberate self-limiting on the part of God in order to speak in understandable terms and with perceived relevance on the part of the hearer” (Gibbs 2005:92). This deliberate self-limiting was not evident in the Judaizers’ actions, which caused concern for Paul and Barnabas that resultant relevance might wane on behalf of the hearers. If this was the case, then teleological forces were beginning to eclipse life-cycle motors.

Regardless of the forces we can conjecture for Paul and Barnabas’ reactions, the rise of dialectic forces results in apostles and presbyters, including Paul and Barnabas, being eis Jerousalem peri tou zetematos toutou (15:2c).

The Jerusalem sojourn begins with reports of aneggeilan te osa o theos epoiesen met aouton (15:4c). In addition, this report included ekdiegoumenoi ten epistpophen ton etheon (15:3c). Reaction from Pharisaic believers was to require outward and inward signs of Judaism, circumcision and Mosaic obedience respectively (15:5). This question elicits polles de zeteseos (15:7a), indicating the stages of the life-cycle forces that are at play (Stage 3 for the Pharisaic believers, and Stage 4 moving into Stage 1 for Paul and Barnabas). They will be addressed by human-to-human dialectic engagement.

Peter’s engagement includes an examination of life-cycle forces (15:7-11), not unexpected for they are more prevalent in the narrative of the first 12 chapters of Acts of the Apostles. Peter reiterates his numinous encounters with a vision and Cornelius (15:7-8) to validate that regarding Gentiles, God emarturesen autos dous to pneuma to agion kathos kai emin (15:8b). Peter responds that the Pharisaic believers’ admonition for Gentiles oti dei peritemnein autous paraggellein te terein ton nomon Mouseos (15:5b) is peirazete God by epitheinai zugon epi ton tpachelon ton matheton on oute oi pateres emon oute emeis ischusamen bastasai (15:10b).

Here human-to-human dialectic forces no longer seem at play, as Peter does not seek synthesis from antithesis and thesis. Rather Peter sees a life-cycle and teleological conclusion that history should have taught the Pharisaic Christians, that teleological legal adherence is historically unattainable. Peter’s exclamatory alla followed by dia tes charitos … pisteuomen sothevai kath on tpopon kakeini (15:11) suggests that he sees life-cycle forces of Stage 4 and 1 in play, where the Old Covenant is superceded by the grace imbued new work of Jesus. Thus, Peter’s argument begins with a brief life-cycle narrative, hints at the ineffectiveness of legalistic teleological forces, and concludes by stressing the inauguration of a new life-cycle and teleological era dia tes chariots tou kupiou Jesou (15:11a).

The audience is silent during Peter’s appeal, perhaps as much for him that speaks, as for what is being said.
James steers the conclave toward conclusion, by recapturing some of Peter’s life-cycle narrative, adding his own appeal to psalmic hymnology (15:16-18). James summation is designed to *me parenochlein tois apo ton etheov epistrepthiousin epi ton theos* (15:19). The *me parenochlein tois apo ton etheov* can be translated “not make it difficult for the Gentiles” (NIV) or “do not trouble those … from among the Gentiles” (NASB). Both carry the import of not unduly troubling or harassing converts over cultural predilections, and thus would seem to lead to a solution that would embrace both judging and sifting a culture, or in Gibb’s words acting “… redemptively with regard to culture, which includes judgment on some elements, but also affirmation in other areas, and a transformation of the whole” (Gibbs 2005:92); hence a “Christ above but transformer of culture” perspective.

Seeming to confirm this analysis, James outlines three general categories of impermissibility: foods sacrificed to idols, adultery and meat and blood from strangled animals (15:20). This triad of prohibitions, will form the basis for a letter of these prohibitions to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (15:23b-29).

The short missive requires no justification via life-cycle motors, other than a brief acknowledgement that *ez emov etarazan umas logos anaskeuzontestas psuchas union, ois ou diesteilametha* (15:24b). Rather the focus is the Spirit-infused, logical and teleological conclusion (15:28) regarding the three prohibitions (15:29).

Herein we see a type of dialectic motor pushing along the council’s conclusions, but not human-to-human synthesis, but rather divine-to-human synthesis. The early Christians note the Holy Spirit’s role in leading to a decisive and divine synthesis as well as a confirmation of the process (*edozen gar to pneumatic to agio kai emin*, 15:28a).

And thus we have three forces at play in the decision to culturally adapt, yet delimit, the young church’s growing appeal to a Gentile culture. The life-cycle motors often initially drive the process, for Judaism is in many ways held together by its historical antecedents. Change is initiated, only after almost reverential acknowledgement of life-cycle forces, yet these forces do not trump teleological ends (e.g. Paul and Barnabas’ reactions to 15:1c, as well as 15:11).

Dialectic forces, when evident, are largely supernatural in connection, where human thesis is submitted to divine thesis (or antithesis) for synthesis, but only such theses that do not betray divine thesis. Thus, the dialectic process is one-sided in these accounts, not allowing for mutability in divine thesis. Rather the dialectic process is sought to yield a synthesis where human ideas are brought into agreement with divine thesis. These are dialectic forces none-the-less.

Finally, evolutionary forces do not seem to be present. Rather than seeing Christianity as a product of survivability, Christianity brings conflict (15:2) and persecution (Acts 8:1). Environmental selection may have an affect upon the church in later centuries, but during the *Acts of the Apostles* only three of the motors for change are readily apparent. One is waning (life-cycle); another is pervasive (divine-to-human dialecticism); and another is emerging (teleological) – influential but not overly conspicuous.

**Some Conclusions from the Acts Narrative**
In the foregoing discussion, we have seen that life-cycle forces as generative mechanisms (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:1, 4, 8) initially played a significant role in the theological basis for ecclesial organizational change. And, we noted that Luke’s literary constructions may have been employed to stress the importance of not underemphasizing spiritual initiation in favor of a natural proclivity toward democratization. Thus, our theological process model commences with life-cycle forces, along with a hint of teleological motors (Acts 1:21-26).

Yet, we see in Acts 2:1-12, 14b-47 and 3:11-26 not an abandonment of a life-cycle force foundation, but rather a parallel and increasingly noticeable emphasis upon teleological motors as religious traditions in Judaism begin to reject the dynamic (Acts 3:1-20) and universal character (Acts 4:11b-12) of the young church’s mission. A resultant series of proclamation and persecution brings to fruition the forecast that the eugellion would move beyond Judea into Samaria (Acts 8:1, 9-24; 8:27-39; 9:1-19a). The resultant religious environments are less exclusive, warranting the young church to struggle with the implications of assimilating hitherto syncretists (Acts 8:9-24; 27-39) and hyper-religionists (Acts 9:1-19a). And, though martyrs such as Stephen will initiates his defense with life-cycle forces, he culminates his argument with a teleological appeal that oitines elabete ton nomon eis diatagas aggelonm kai ouk ephiulazate (Acts 7:53).

On the heels of this expansion emerges the difficult topic of the assimilation of marginal religionists, syncretic religionists, God-fearers and zealots. A capstone materializes out of the simultaneous visions of a Roman centurion and Peter, culminating with a teleological conclusion that outward teleological manifestations of the Holy Spirit belie in this case his internal manifestation (Acts 10:45-46; 11:15-17). Life-cycle motors are less prominent, as a more expedient and evident teleological picture emerges. A journey to preach the Good News to the environs of Galatia, results in a teleological descriptions by Luke of leadership appointments (Acts 14:23a), committing them to Christ (Acts 14:23b), and winning a large number of disciples (Acts 14:21). Here again dialectic forces are seen primarily in the prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23a) that allow human theses to be synthesized by God’s perspective.

The consequence of these spiritual encounters, challenges and avenues was to convene a council at Jerusalem to address the emerging questions of Christ’s perspective toward culture (Acts 15:1-29). Teleological strategies of the Judaizers elicit a largely teleological response from the council, with three teleological manifestations required of Gentile converts (Acts 15:19-21, 24-29). The council’s emerging perspective of “Christ above but transformer of culture” indicating dynamic equivalence in methodology was also indicating that teleological motors were beginning to tactically eclipse life-cycle forces.

**Toward A Theology of Ecclesial Organizational Change:**

**A Theological Process-Model**

Miroslav Volf, in his reflections on concepts germinated by Jurgen Moltmann, summarizes nicely the potential for ecclesial change that the early Christians faced. Volf reflects that we witness in the *Acts of the Apostles* “...a vision of a public theology for a
public gospel: looking through the spectacles of its own culture, it sees the city whose builder and architect is God; situated in the multiple relations of power; it advocates the weakness of the crucified a new form of power; dwelling on the margins, it seeks to bring the reign of the triune God to bear on all domains of life” (Volf 1996:113).

And herein lies their challenge and our commission for ecclesial organizational change. The tasks mandated by Christ’s last words and great commission, dictated it. And, in their human frailty wed with divine unction, the young church moved into a church theology of organizational change that may be again germane for a modernist church struggling with similar seismic changes in culture and wondering how these should be reflected in church systems.

Thus, the theological process-model for eliciting change regarding assimilation of Gentiles into the fledgling Christian church, seems to be delineated in six stages (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1
A Church Theology Process-Model for Ecclesial Change as Meteschematisa

1. Life-cycle Narratives: A limited recapturing and acknowledgment of the life-cycle motors that have brought us to this point and that have bearing on the change under consideration are discussed.

2. Sotierologically-based Teleology: An unassuming, yet pervasive and increasing emphasis on teleological forces that should elicit sotierological results.

3. Divine-to-human Dialectic: A not unassuming, but central dialectic process where synthesis results from human thesis that is submitted for divine confirmation and not antithesis.

4. Human-to-human Dialectic: A parallel though secondary interpersonal (i.e. human) synthesis is sought, based upon personal appraisals of life-cycle forces as well as the human-divine dialectic.
5. Return to Stage 2, Sotierologically-based Teleology. Here there is customarily a return to Stage 2, where sotierologically-based teleology is reconsidered once more before the change is accepted.

6. Change: A resultant change process that is codified and stated in such a way as to attain verifiability and clarity. This change lies somewhere (Figure 1.1) between divine reality and the human arena.

A Theological Process-Model of Meteschematisa

Our process-model does not seem to follow the trajectory expected by Messianic Christians, as numinous experiences and encounters (Acts 22:2-4, 9:3-7; 10:3-7, 11-15, 44-46; 12:7-8; 16:9) guide them into expanded ministry among the Gentiles and into the Gentile strongholds of Eastern Europe. Though no Greek words describe this explicitly, meteschematisa comes the closest, denoting an emphasis upon an outward change in appearance that is not the “expected or customary form” (Schneider 1964-1974:958), when the process is guided by God. Thus, meteschematisa can be appropriated as term to describe unexpected or uncustomary outward changes in organizational structure and the appearance of it. As we saw in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, meteschematisa emphasizes an external change in appearance based upon an inner adjustment. This would be a good summation of the above theological narratives.

A Theological Process-Model As A Sub-set of Church Theology

Finally, as de Jongh van Arkel argued in “Understanding Change as Practical Theologian” (De Jongh van Arkel 2001), we must move beyond the practice where “in theology we often talk about change as if there were little to explain or understand” (2001:31). De Jongh van Arkel argues, “religious change …. is still an open field for research” with a potential to result in a more complex, yet holistic view of humankind and its actions (2001:58). And, we must foster “a more informal understanding and theory of change (that) would become part of our basic theories in practical theology” (2001:31). Subsequently, de Jongh van Arkel suggests that a theology of personal change is a needed as a subset of practical theology. I would concur, and further suggest that this initial inquiry into a theology of ecclesial organizational change is another requisite sub-set.

Yet, Cobb’s well crafted argument also appeals to me, that when dealing with change we ought to call the process “church theology” rather than the more customary practical theology (Cobb 1996:199). This, Cobb feels, connotes the efficacious nature of the task, “that takes its problems not from the intellectual and scholarly tradition, but from the life of the church” (ibid.).” Thus, my preference is to emphasize the above as an emerging church (or ecclesial) theology for organizational change, a theology rooted in authentic and relevant impact within and toward the church that begins in the intentions of God.

Questions For Further Research

Research questions generated from this initial inquiry may include:
1. Does this theological process-model for ecclesial change bear evidence in other organizational changes described in the Scriptures (e.g. from extended family to community, to imprisoned people, to warrior nation, to theocracy, to monarchy, etc.)?

2. How does organizational change accommodate and even encourage transitions from the synagogue structure of religious observance, into the communal nature of early church life?

3. What are the models for change associated with changes from volunteer communities into professionally-driven organizations?

4. Do subsequent organizational changes in Early Church history attest to this theological model, or is another more appropriate?

5. How, where and why have theological process-models for organizational change developed and elasticized throughout Church history?

6. When compared over extended lengths of time, are process-models with less or more forces evident in the Scriptures and/or Church history?

Citations:


