

# Church in Ruins

—Wm Cabb

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ultimately fail), we then undertook a study of its driving values. What made it "tick" the way it did? Although many values are inherent in an organization, not all of them are driving. An organization's character, reflected in its culture, is a compilation of driving values: organizational, social/cultural, personal.

We then looked at the driving purpose or mission of the organization and asked: Are these the values needed? Are they wanted?

How do you get a company to undergo fundamental value change, to move toward driving values that will actually help the company serve its purpose? Change in organizational character is required. This means people will have to change the way they think about work, compensation, each other, the mission—the list is frighteningly long. This process of change, or growth, creates distrust, anxiety, and a lust for self-preservation among those most significantly affected. I found this to be true in the company with which I was consulting, even among those most in favor of and committed to the growth. The parallels for the church are obvious.

## The Courage to Change

We humans like clear direction rather than the risk of ambiguity when we move forward. It appears to be God's nature to require change, yet it is man's nature to resist change. How, then, do we cope during times of change?

When Israel left Egypt and was not yet a nation in the true sense of the word, the people lived for some time in a state of flux. Caleb stands out as one who responded in a unique and constructive manner to the very real pressures of the time. From his life come valuable lessons for living with change.

Caleb was one of the proven leaders among the people of the Exodus. Moses picked him as one of the spies to check out the Promised Land. God made clear the role of the spies (Numbers 13:2): They were to survey the land, but it was God's

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job to deliver it into their possession. Confusion of these roles would produce failure.

Change can be quite unpredictable at times. Efforts should be directed toward fulfilling God's designated roles and not toward controlling the process. Wrong focus can lead to confusion of roles. Confusion of roles will produce failure for the church as it did for the children of Israel.

As they spied out the land, the obstacles to receiving the promise became clear (13:28-33). Caleb, however, chose to focus on the promise, not the problem. The tendency, in times of change, is to focus on what we risk losing instead of what we potentially will gain. Therefore, faith and courage are two fundamental ingredients of leadership during change. At Kadesh (13:25-33), Caleb demonstrated moral courage; his faith did not waver. The other ten spies measured their strength against the problem and came up short. Caleb instead focused on the vision God gave him.

Joshua was the only one of the twelve spies to join Caleb in this perspective. The other ten chose to focus on their inability to take the land, which was not their role in the first place. They would not let God be God, and because they were leaders, the people listened to them. When leadership fails to have a vision, the vision falters (14:30-33). Those involved in implementing change must have a shared vision if there is to be any success at all in communicating ownership of that vision to others.

Change inevitably puts leadership under fire (14:4). At Kadesh, Moses' wisdom and legitimacy came into question. But Joshua and Caleb, in spite of the antagonism of the people, remained steadfast in their role. They were the spies; God was the overcomer. Their vision was clear; the Lord could do what He had promised. The people, however, were paralyzed by fear (14:9-10).

It is one thing to take into account wise consideration of the risks and liabilities associated with change so as to have



awareness and preparation to cope. It is an entirely different matter to be so committed to present realities that fear of losing them paralyzes the very people who should be involved in change. Fear of such problems paralyzes the people.

Moses assumed the shepherd's role in all this as an agent for reconciliation (14:19). He knew that what God planned would come to pass (14:20-21). God would use these people or set them aside. His plans would not be impeded. This is helpful today as we consider Christ's commitment to His church. Those unable to change will be set aside if change is of the Lord. Indeed, only Joshua and Caleb lived to inherit the promise and to inhabit the land. At eighty-five, Caleb was still going strong (Joshua 14:11-12). He did not shrink from the rigors of battle, and he succeeded where others failed. His vision remained clear, and his calling never wore out. Caleb wholly followed the Lord.

### Commitment to Movement or Institution

One sees in this illustration that Caleb's heart in the matter was different from the others (Numbers 14:24). He was wholly focused on the Lord—not self, not others, not obstacles. He was committed to a movement, not just a band of people. What lay behind the other ten spies' reticence and complaint about leadership was a fundamental unfaithfulness toward God (14:2,27,33). Caleb's example reminds us to be committed to a movement, not just an institution.

Because of problems in his organization, Caleb endured forty years of frustration and disappointment. The difference in being committed to a movement and not to an organization or institution is in how the vision grips you. Can you live with the predictable unfaithfulness of others? Does your vision enable you to focus on the promise of the future and not the problems of the present? Are you wholly focused on the Lord such that giving up is not an option? Perseverance will outlast the consequences of change.

Hierarchically structured organizations require change initiated from the top down. That is where the freedom to initiate exists at first and where the authority to provide and preserve creative freedom resides. Simultaneously, the perception of ownership must be developed from the bottom up, where people most need to develop trust. This requires a highly participative process where various elements of the organization mutually affect the outcome. The change agent must do his best to influence this kind of balance, but he cannot demand it.

Do our ministries genuinely serve others or just ourselves? Do we serve others to fulfill our ministry goals, or is our ministry plan to serve in ways others perceive as genuinely helpful? Do we measure success by the quality of the relationships produced, or by the quantity, size, or numbers associated with our programs? We cannot cause growth in ministry; that is the sole province of God (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, 2 Corinthians 5:16-19). At best, we can remove obstacles to growth, unfeathering the Holy Spirit. We can add real value to ministry when the goal is not God's blessing but rather to be deserving of that blessing. Our role in influencing change is to be participants in the Kingdom, acting with wisdom and being led by the Holy Spirit.

### Avoiding Institutionalization

Before looking at principles for organizational renewal for the Body of Christ, it will be helpful to understand more deeply this matter of institution and movement.

An institution is something established that has a somewhat permanent rule of conduct or government, something forming a prominent or established feature in social or national life. When someone refers to a group or function having become an institution, he is recognizing certain established patterns, laws, or regulations that further some purpose. Institutions face several challenges. As they acquire capital property (buildings, etc.) and develop programs, resources that



used to support the furtherance of their purpose are shunted into maintaining those properties and programs. Sometimes upkeep can become their downfall.

Institutions are characterized by *bounded set thinking*. That is, there are written or unwritten rules that define whether a person is in or out of line. Now policies, methods, expectations, and rules are not harmful in themselves. They can encourage movement in the right direction. "You shall not commit adultery" is an extremely helpful rule for a healthy society. But unhelpful boundaries for institutions include rigid policies, forms that have outlived their functions, expectations for uniformity and conformity, rules that impede rather than enable. Bureaucracy tends to force procedures, rules, guidelines, policies, etc., on people. "Succeeding," or at least staying out of trouble, depends on staying within boundaries or achieving certain criteria. It is true that organization is necessary; rules help us function. But they also reflect social and cultural realities. As reality changes, the organization must also change if the institution is to still accomplish its purpose. But institutions are fixed by definition—they don't change. The goal, then, is to avoid institutionalization, to avoid becoming so bound by rules and tradition that relevant change is impossible.

A company I (Jeff) was helping illustrates how institutions outlive their usefulness when they are committed to forms that no longer serve the function or purpose for which they were designed. In this case, the outmoded form was literally a form—a computer form.

This company struggled with an attitude problem. The representatives in the field were supported administratively by a national headquarters, but they felt headquarters was totally out of touch with reality. Further, they felt headquarters had the attitude that they were the ones to be supported by the field representatives, not the other way around. A computer form became the focus and symbol of this controversy.

Headquarters used a complicated form to handle financial transactions for field representatives. The form was so complicated that many field people couldn't figure out how to use it, and mistakes often resulted. When someone suggested that a new form be designed, the representatives were told that this form was the one preferred by the data entry people in accounting. It was argued that satisfying the desires of a few clerks was not worth frustrating hundreds of representatives. Headquarters responded by saying 5,000 forms had been printed, and policy dictated using them until they were gone. Then a committee would look into the matter.

As I checked into this matter, I discovered that the form was actually unnecessary. The clerks found this form equally frustrating and long ago changed their procedures. The form had ceased to serve the function it was designed for. Yet, there was stubborn, institutional commitment to its preservation.

The church faces the same challenges. Its purpose is to be in the world for the lost, not for itself. Yet it consumes its resources primarily on itself and often does not recognize when its forms, programs, activities, traditions, and rules no longer accomplish their purpose with the audience.

### Becoming a Movement

A movement is the rapid spread of an idea right for its time, usually in response to clear need. The Body of Christ needs to be propagating movement, not establishing institutions. This takes *centered set thinking*. That is, the set is defined not by its boundaries or rules, but by its focus or purpose. Movement (motion) and direction are important to centered set criteria. Is progress toward the goal in the right direction and in the right amount? Rather than looking at the number of verses memorized, one focuses on the qualitative changes resulting from an individual's efforts to bind the Word on his heart. (Scripture memory is only one of many constructive ways to encourage



this.) Rather than counting baptisms, professions of faith, or cars in the parking lot to measure numeric growth, one looks to spiritual growth in support of benevolence, missions, outreach, and expanding interpersonal relationships within the congregation for a sense of progress. Fruit of the Spirit, character growth, and collaboration in community become measurement criteria, replacing budgets, positions, and numbers.

How can something institutionalized shift and become movement-oriented? How can an organization bounded by rigid rules, concepts, or traditions become unencumbered without losing what is necessary and valuable in those rules, concepts, and traditions? How can ministry provide the organization necessary to maintain order in chaos, yet at the same time create the opportunity for chaos amidst order? Answering these questions requires a process of organizational renewal. They are answered as you move ahead, not before you begin. This change process takes risk, and risk is antithetical to control-oriented people and institutions. We have no choice but to repent of the lust for control.

### Organizational Culture

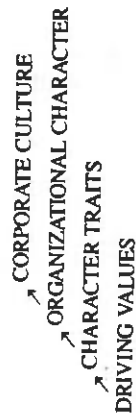
Organizational culture, a new buzz word in the business world, really applies to any group of people gathered around a common mission, purpose, or vision. The church has its own organizational culture that reflects not only its spiritual nature, but its denominational history, doctrine, social mores, and so on. Organizational culture, like a mirror, reflects the underlying character and driving values of the group—the environment. To influence change in organizational character, one does not focus innovative strategies on the organizational culture itself any more than a person, displeased with his reflection in the mirror, seeks to change his face by painting the mirror. A change in culture is achieved by a change in underlying character.

The interplay between culture, character, and driving values can be seen in Church XYZ. One expression of the corporate

culture of this local church is the control used to maintain the quality, efficiency, and production of its programs and ministries. This control stems not only from the business model of management the denomination has bought into, but the “look good, maintain control” philosophy of the seminary training of the pastor and his associates as well as the director of Christian education and music director.

Although organization and control can be admirable and required qualities, this control is applied in an insensitive and autocratic manner. Supporting this environment of unhealthy control are several traits that together contribute to the corporate character of Church XYZ. It is located in a part of the country, for example, that typically displays a low opinion of the abilities of women. In addition, some key lay leaders behave in a manner only another *prima donna* could love. The leadership of this church values personal control and male dominance in an environment that encourages authoritarian excesses. These few driving values (both organizational and personal) have set the character of this church.

The point of examining Church XYZ is that if the person who wants to influence change tries to influence corporate culture directly—namely, the debilitating autocratic control—he will be ignoring the very characteristics feeding that culture trait. He would be addressing the symptoms and not the problem, and the corporate culture would not actually change. Remember, corporate culture is a reflection of underlying organizational character, which in turn is composed of characteristic ways of responding. These character traits are usually a composite of driving values: organizational, social, personal.





other look; if conditions seem limiting, they can be changed with the Father's help.

The issue is not how little we have, but how much our Father has to give. The potential for a fulfilled ministry may be at our finger tips, but we miss it because we live by scarcity suppositions rather than abundance mentality.

### **Step 5: Cultivate a Break-Out Spirit**

Imagination and innovation are in short supply everywhere, especially in the church. For some unknown reason, many church members want things to remain like they have always been — as if that were possible. Such a hold-the-line posture does not square with reality because the essential nature of both a human being and a church is to change, adapt, and grow. The new keeps ganging up on the old.

Christian history, particularly near the dawn of the early church, offers many examples of persons who took the Gospel in maverick ways to their times. Methods or patterns of action were not sacrosanct to them. Most often, however, they did not try fresh approaches for the sake of newness, but because archaic ways no longer worked. Circumstances and failures often crowded them to break out of old ways of thinking and doing.

This break-out spirit can be seen in the long pilgrimage of faith. For example, the decision to choose the first group of lay leaders in the early church came about because the disciples could not meet the increasing demands of the assistance program for needy widows. They solved the problem in a new way which became the foundation of all shared leadership between clergy and laity. That decision provided a partnership in ministry that was completely new to their way of thinking.

Nationality prejudice was the order of the day until Peter went to the house of Cornelius and found himself declaring, "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34). From that day until now, the church has been struggling to tear down walls of separation between people groups. Even old stick-in-the-mud Peter broke out of his traditional patterns of thinking to

open the church doors to people of all origins.

Luther forever changed the heart of Christianity when, after drawing close to God, he saw things in a whole new light. Luther's break-out spirit first sought the mind of God and then asked persistent questions of his environment. He sought demanding cures and applied them to himself, his church, and his world. As a result of his break-out spirit, he became a Christian revolutionary that renewed the church, taking her back — or was it forward — to the authority of the Bible.

Wesley sharpened his break-out spirit when he applied the Gospel to problems in his society and started the Methodist movement, which continues to impact the world to this day. Like all break-out leaders in the history of Christendom, Wesley intersected personal faith, needs of the times, and the power of the Gospel.

Such a break-out spirit requires pastors to be proactive in ministry, a trait few have observed firsthand in the church. From the world of business, Robert J. Kriegel offers an observation about being proactive that applies to churches, "Research shows that the overwhelming majority of Americans (85 percent) are reactive and static, not action- or dynamic- or instinct-oriented. They wait and meet, meet and wait. With a ready arsenal of conservative, conventional wisdom at their disposal, they try to control outcomes in an out-of-control world."<sup>6</sup>

Proactive means taking initiative to find solutions, to make things happen, and to make the church more influential in the lives of the people it serves. Initiative is the key ingredient. That should not be too hard to accomplish because human beings were created to be active rather than reactive and to solve problems rather than be overwhelmed by them.

A useful way to start is to try to think like a beginner again, like you did before you were burdened by experience, expertise, success, or the necessity to defend your position. The challenge, then, is to live out your imagination, vision, and conscience and resist the impact of your conditioning, failure,