

## ENTREPRENEURIAL ECCLESIOLOGICAL NARRATIVES AND THE UNITY PROJECT:

### Exploring Techno-Scientific-Capitalist Impulses as Ecumenical Challenge and Opportunity

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#### I. Introduction

The phrase “entrepreneurial church” appeared at least as early as 1979 in *Justification by Success: The Invisible Captivity of the Church* by a book by John Stanley Glen.<sup>1</sup> It became popular in the 1990’s as a means to distinguish the adaptable model of Willow Creek and Saddleback from that of traditional churches<sup>2</sup> as well as to emphasize a concern “simultaneously for the salvation of persons and the social transforming of places”<sup>3</sup> before being accorded status as a distinctive mark of evangelical ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> With expressions ranging from descriptions of church-planting<sup>5</sup> to approaches to mission<sup>6</sup> to conferences themes,<sup>7</sup> the concept has unsurprisingly also attracted critiques such as Doug Webster’s unfavorable contrast of “entrepreneurial church growth” with “organic church growth”<sup>8</sup> and Sally Morgenthaler’s denouncement of the paradigm, paradoxically for its failure to innovate.<sup>9</sup>

The roots of entrepreneurial approaches, however, lie deep in the revival tradition’s

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<sup>1</sup> John Stanley Glen, *Justification by Success: The Invisible Captivity of the Church* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 33.

<sup>2</sup> “...churches historically are slow to change. Yet in this religious marketplace, change is essential because successful churches are churches that respond quickly to the preferences of increasingly careful church shoppers. This aptly describes the approach of a new breed of entrepreneurial congregations”. C. Kirk Hadaway, “Church Growth in North America: The Character of a Religious Marketplace,” in *Church and Denominational Growth in America: What Does (and Does Not) Cause Growth or Decline*, ed. David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 129 - describing Ray Bakke’s use of the term in Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Howard A. Snyder, “The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology” in John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed. *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Norman, *Five Years Later – or – Things I Wish I Knew When I Planted A Church* [http://portablechurch.blogspot.com/2006\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://portablechurch.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html) (accessed 9 January, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Concordia University currently offers a course in *Entrepreneurial Mission Planting* whose description reads: “Explores business and entrepreneurial methods as they apply to church planters and new mission starts. Practical emphasis upon understanding entrepreneurial leadership, team ministry, learning from success, dealing with risk, reaching new people, developing marketing materials, financial planning and cash flow, and balancing a busy life will be presented by guest lecturers experienced in entrepreneurial church leadership.” Concordia University, “Christ College, Graduate Studies Course Descriptions,” TH540: Entrepreneurial Mission Planting, [http://cui.edu/academicprograms/graduate/theology/index\\_ektid2208.aspx](http://cui.edu/academicprograms/graduate/theology/index_ektid2208.aspx) (accessed 9 January 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Kent Hunter, “the Church Doctor” and endorsed by John Maxwell, was a keynote speaker for the sixth annual conference on *The Entrepreneurial Church* in 2004 sponsored by the Joy Leadership Center, that advertised a “one-stop-shop opportunity to learn about every aspect of launching a new ministry from the ground up, adding a mission-motivated enterprise, or expanding facilities.... an all-encompassing gathering of experts and authorities in church planting, facilities building, campus development, technology, organization and enterprise development to equip churches emerging as mission center for their communities.” Walt Kallestad, “Joy Leadership Center Presents the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual ‘Entrepreneurial Church’ Conference,” [www.churchsolutionsmag.com/hotnews/48h210376.html](http://www.churchsolutionsmag.com/hotnews/48h210376.html) (accessed 9 January, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Doug Webster, *The Case for Organic Church Growth*, p.1, <http://fpcsd.org/resources/articles/ChurchGrowth-Organic.PDF>, (accessed 9 January 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Sally Morgenthaler, “Leadership in a Flattened World: Grassroots Culture and the Demise of the CEO Model,” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Baker Books, 2007), 187.

attempt to respond to Christ's final and important command to "make disciples of all peoples," and are driven by narratives that interpret contemporary missional activity in terms of increasing spheres of influence within the basic framework provided by the "Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria-ends of the earth" formula<sup>10</sup> set out and modeled historically in Acts. For many American-born churches, such narratives were modified in significant ways as they were embodied and re-narrated amid cultural norms favoring science, technology, and capitalism. The conflation of all three terms to denote a set of associated "impulses" provides a conceptual tool for reflecting on their collective influence while continuing to distinguish between them.

Whereas "techno" signifies both the *objects* of technology and the *application* of theories in the form of *technique*, "scientific" signifies both a set of *explanatory theories* and the *method* used for obtaining them. Similarly, capitalism may be distinguished as *an economic system oriented around bargaining by individuals, private property, and reinvestment of resources into further production*,<sup>11</sup> that has some obvious connections with the first two. Consideration of Henry Ford illustrates the dynamic relationship between all three: he created a technique of production to build a particular technology (cars) based on scientific theories (of combustion etc.) that he sold as private property within a bargaining market and subsequently reinvested the profits in both further production and scientific research necessary to improve his technique and the technology further.

The ecclesiological significance of these impulses is their contribution to relativization and displacement of prior ecclesiastical norms, sometimes even while such norms remain the ostensive identity of a particular community. To frame this dynamic simply as "pragmatism" is insufficiently attentive to the way techno-scientific-capitalist impulses interact in mutually reinforcing ways to empower entrepreneurial narratives for destabilization of historical identities through self-propagation of their own implicitly norm-less ecclesiology. Though such narratives are immensely productive of all sorts of new ecclesiological expressions, they are not carried by those for whom particular innovations solidify into a kind of tradition, but rather by those who arise as subsequent critics carrying out their own entrepreneurial projects.

The church growth movement, as primary inheritor of these narratives from the revival tradition, exemplifies a set of associated ideas and practices that are both a product and propagator of techno-scientific-capitalist impulses. With such a heritage, declaring those who participate captive to culture is low-hanging fruit, yet proposed solutions to distortions resulting from this captivity are limited by their own vulnerability to these impulses within the internal logic of the narratives. One might, given the self-sustaining nature of growth narratives, expect entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives to be indifferent to questions of unity, but this is not the case among revivalists, the church growth movement, or even their subsequent critics. In contrast to relatively simple formulations of unity requiring conformity to a single norm, these groups develop a conception of unity as a *project* that is a subset of the grand project of the great commission. Rather than being threatened by the relativization and displacement of ecclesiastical norms by techno-scientific-capitalist impulses, the conceptualization of unity as project draws on those very impulses as resources for navigating the complexities left in the wake of such a process. Parachurch organizations embodied complex expressions of unity long before "pluriformity" appeared in ecumenical lexicons. Now networks of leaders gather around megachurch or emerging church paradigms, expressing unity in common ways of subverting polity to mission.

The World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission text, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, resonates with the core of these narratives in its affirmation of evangelization as the "foremost task of the church",<sup>12</sup> but displays limited capacity for including complex forms of

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>11</sup> Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity From Itself* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 34.

<sup>12</sup> World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *The Nature and Mission of the Church – A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper no. 198, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc->

informal networking and more importantly, the formulations of membership within local congregations. Attempts to address the divergent conceptions of unity apparent in entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives on the one hand and enduring institutional forms on the other may be aided by consideration of the political typologies Philip Bobbitt uses to interpret history from the late fifteenth century to the present in his seminal work, *The Shield of Achilles*.<sup>13</sup> His view that the nation-state is at present being overtaken by the market-state as the dominant form of social organization offers a provocative lens for considering the challenges and opportunities ecclesiological forms most closely resembling such market-states will present for ecumenism in the near future.

## II. Roots of Entrepreneurial Ecclesiological Narratives

In *The Book of Church Growth*,<sup>14</sup> Thom Rainer identifies John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, and Charles Finney as important predecessors of Donald McGavran. Each of these icons of the revival tradition exemplify an entrepreneurial approach to ministry that relativized and in some cases replaced prior ecclesiastical norms.

Even brief glances through Wesley's letters reveal the way he prioritized adaptability for the sake of communicating the gospel. In 1764 he advised Samuel Furley:

if we *think* with the wise, yet must speak with the *vulgar*. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words... which our language affords. When I had been a member of the University about ten years, I wrote and talked much like you do now. But when I talked to plain people in the castle, or the town, I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style and adopt the language of those I spoke to.<sup>15</sup>

A letter to Henry Venn the following year is suggestive of connections Wesley made between unity and his innovative approaches. Early on he writes, "I have laboured after union with all whom I believe to be united with Christ. I have sought it again and again; but in vain.... I impose my notions upon none"<sup>16</sup> and later in response to critics accusing him of "irregularity": "If they do not ask me to preach in their churches, *they* are accountable for my preaching in the fields."<sup>17</sup> Whatever the initial strengths of this new technique of outdoor preaching, they were enhanced first by feedback loops of letters and journal entries (that made his followers *method*-ist not merely in terms of personal piety but also in terms of organizational expansion) and then by the reinvestment of converts back into a reproductive ministry.<sup>18</sup> The presence of such impulses is nowhere more apparent than Wesley's famous subversion of the parish system: "in whatever part of [the world] I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation."<sup>19</sup>

To understand these dynamics for Wesley's friend and co-laborer, George Whitefield, one need look no further than Harry Stout's characterization of Whitefield as an actor-preacher who eschewed institutional attachment to ensure a broad appeal and redefined the significance of religious assemblies in terms of the experience of New Birth.<sup>20</sup> Stout identifies this supernatural

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commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-nature-and-mission-of-the-church-a-stage-on-the-way-to-a-common-statement.html (accessed 9 January, 2008), §110.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 26.

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. 16 (Thomas Blanshard, J. Buttworth and Son, W. Baynes, J. Hamilton, and W. Kent, 1813), 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> George Hunter recently summarized John Wesley's contribution to church growth theory in "John Wesley as Church Growth Strategist," [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/21-02.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/21-02.htm) (accessed 10 February, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Journal, 11 June, 1739. John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, Vol. 1* (New York: J&J Harper, 1827), 138.

<sup>20</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.

experience as the revivalist analog of the broader concept of “sensation” within John Locke’s epistemology<sup>21</sup> and notes how collaboration with Benjamin Franklin fueled his utilization of “departure from traditional associations that was moving their worlds towards new networks premised on voluntary association and self-interest.”<sup>22</sup> He furthermore draws attention to the almost symbiotic relationship between George Whitefield and his theater-critics, not simply for the similarity in dramatic technique but also their methods for establishing credibility on the basis of audience-size: “Between them, revivalists and theater owners made ‘head counts’ a science in the emerging social order governed by market forces and voluntary support rather than direction from above.”<sup>23</sup> The displacement factor of Whitefield’s theology is expressed most concisely in his much quoted sentiment concerning sixteenth century reformers: “But what is *Calvin*, or what is *Luther*? Let us look above names and parties; let Jesus, the ever-lovely Jesus, be our all in all.—So that he be preached, and his divine image stamped more and more upon people’s souls”.<sup>24</sup> The effect of this approach in bringing otherwise divided groups together for revival meetings appeared within biographical accounts as evidence of God’s work through him:

Whitefield was a stripling of twenty-one; but wherever he went crowds flocked to hear him. At Bristol, the whole city seemed alarmed; Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, and sectarians of all kinds, ran after him; and churches were as full on week days as they had used to be on Sundays.... Whitefield was preaching as often as four times a day, and had become so famous that Raikes, of Gloucester, and others, thought it an enrichment of their newspapers to insert accounts of his doings.<sup>25</sup>

By the time Charles Finney began preaching, the Industrial Revolution had already advanced sufficiently to produce Luddite riots in England.<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that when he attempted to articulate techniques for promoting a revival he chose *machinery* as a metaphorical anti-type for his approach.

Look at the Sabbath school for instance, and see how much machinery there is, and how little of the power of godliness.... You see why so much preaching is wasted... It is because the church will not break up their fallow ground.... There is mechanical religion enough, but very little that looks like deep heart-work.... You may get into an *excitement* without this breaking up; you may show a kind of zeal, but it won’t last long, and it won’t take hold of sinners, unless your hearts are broken up. The reason is, that you go about it mechanically...<sup>27</sup>

The peculiar dynamics by which techno-scientific-capitalist impulses propagate themselves become apparent upon consideration that Finney is fundamentally making a case for getting beyond mechanization by utilizing a superior *technique*. As soon as it is possible to (through analysis) articulate a series of steps to alter an observed pattern, the activity is re-mechanized.

More important, perhaps, are the two principles Finney puts forward in his lecture on “Measures to Promote Revivals”:

I. That under the gospel dispensation, God has *established no particular system of*

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B. Eerdmans, 1991), 205.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>24</sup> George Whitefield, *The Works of Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* (Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 428-429.

<sup>25</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists* (Harper and Brothers, 1876), 171.

<sup>26</sup> William Law Mathieson, *England in Transition, 1789-1832: A Study of Movements* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 136.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 43-44.

*measures* to be employed and invariably adhered to in promoting religion.

II. ...our present forms of public worship, and every thing, so far as *measures* are concerned, have been arrived at *by degrees*, and by *a succession of New Measures*.<sup>28</sup>

Finney's pragmatic approach meant that "it was left to the discretion of the church to determine, from time to time, what *measures* shall be adopted and what *forms* pursued, in giving the gospel its power."<sup>29</sup> Though Finney argues that the lack of specificity concerning the form obedience to the great commission took meant that any form could be used, the apostles endeavored "to make known the gospel in the *most effectual way*". His open-ended pragmatism is bounded only by the examples he chooses to illustrate this approach: "This is done by building churches, holding stated or other meetings, and so on."<sup>30</sup>

In regard to his second point, he begins by relativizing measures such as clerical dress by noting, "All these had doubtless been introduced by a succession of innovations".<sup>31</sup> Finney relishes the irony that even the insignificant changes of fashion are "denounced as *innovation*"—the backdrop of his reflection on issues of order in public worship: "The same difficulties have been met in effecting every change because the church have felt as if God had established just the *mode to which they were used to*."<sup>32</sup> After a brief description of objections raised concerning various forms of lay ministry, he declares: "So it has been in regard to all the active movements of the church. Missions, Sunday Schools, and every thing of the kind, have been opposed, and have gained their present hold in the church only by a succession of struggles and a series of innovations."<sup>33</sup> Finney is presenting nothing less than a manifesto for innovative entrepreneurship that is willing to discard any established form in order to communicate the gospel more effectively.

It is not only the logical sequence of Finney's argument that matters, however. The climax of his argument is a re-narration of Christian history driven by key moments of innovation:

*The apostles* were great innovators.... *Luther and the Reformers*. You all know what difficulties they had to contend with, and the reason was that they were trying to introduce new measures.... *Wesley and his coadjutors*.... [Wesley] was every where denounced as an innovator.... Whitefield was a man of the same school, and like Wesley was an innovator.... Often he well nigh lost his life, and barely escaped by the skin of his teeth. Now, every body looks upon him as the glory of the age in which he lived.... *President Edwards*. This great man was famous in his day for new measures.... All these were devoted men, seeking ways to do good and save souls. And precisely the same kind of opposition was experienced by all, obstructing their path, and trying to destroy their character and influence.<sup>34</sup>

It is only after setting up this entrepreneurial narrative that Finney begins to discuss anxious meetings, protracted meetings, and the anxious seat.

Finney's contemporary, Charles Spurgeon provides important insights to the ways that rapid growth of congregations and building projects necessary to accommodate them came to play a dominant feature in entrepreneurial narratives, expanding beyond the great commission pattern to incorporate other Biblical imagery. As biographer Robert Shindler recounts, following rapid growth at New Park Street, Spurgeon used the Jericho narrative to declare "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, and by faith this wall at the back shall come down too!"<sup>35</sup> after which a

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 235-236.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Shindler, *From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (New

building fund was created to expand the facilities that led to the use of Exeter Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, and a crowd of 23,000 at the Crystal Palace.<sup>36</sup> In 1865, Spurgeon began publishing *The Sword and the Trowel* with its evocative cover featuring a heroic Nehemiah building the walls of Jerusalem with a sword near at hand.<sup>37</sup> The Nehemiah narrative would later provide Shindler with a theological explanation of opposition to Spurgeon's most significant building project, the Metropolitan Tabernacle that opened in 1861: "Of course there were obstructionists, as there always are whenever any good and great work is projected. It was so in the time of Zerubbabel, when the second temple at Jerusalem was in course of erection."<sup>38</sup> While Shindler attributes much of the fundraising to appreciative friends who wished to support Spurgeon's preaching, he also notes "remarkable interpositions of providence": God provided land they did not have a good reason to expect and prompted an uninformed contributor to give £5,000 to the project. Like prior revivals, the participation of those belonging to various denominations seemed to display the kind of unity God intended and was acclaimed as further evidence of divine mandate.<sup>39</sup> The relativizing narrative implicit in these activities is made explicit in Spurgeon's first sermon in the Metropolitan Tabernacle:

The tendency of man, if left alone, is continually to go further and further from God; and the church of God itself is no exception to the general rule. For the first few years during and after the apostolic era, Christ Jesus was preached; but gradually the church departed from the central point, and began rather to preach ceremonials and church offices than the person of their Lord. So has it been in these modern times. We also have fallen into the same error, — at least, to a degree; and have gone from preaching Christ to preaching doctrines about Christ; inferences which may be drawn from His life, or definitions which may be gathered from His discourses.... I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist.... I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist.... but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply, 'It is Jesus Christ.' My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a body of divinity, admirable and excellent in its way ; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity, or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel, who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>40</sup>

The standard of numerical growth likewise plays a dominant role in Shindler's assessment of the Pastors College<sup>41</sup> that is coupled with a sense of unity in efforts for evangelization promoted by

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York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1892), 90-91.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>37</sup> The first article declared, "We speak in love; but not in soft words and trimming sentences. We shall not court controversy, but we shall not shun it when the cause of God demands it.... We would ply the trowel with untiring hand for the building up of Jerusalem's dilapidated walls, and wield the sword with vigour and valor against the enemies of truth." Charles Spurgeon, "Our Aims and Intentions," *The Sword and the Trowel*, 1865 – quoted in Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon's Autobiography* (Flemming H. Revell, 1899), 308.

<sup>38</sup> Shindler, 109.

<sup>39</sup> "among the thousands of contributors to the Tabernacle Fund, there were many who belonged to other denominations, and not a few who were attached members of the Church of England." Ibid., 110-112.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>41</sup> "the increase of the churches pastored by men who have been trained at the Pastors' College maintains a high ratio, never surpassed, and seldom equalled in churches presided over by men from other colleges." Shindler, 143. "So far as results can be tabulated, the additions to the membership of churches in the Baptist denomination, which are due, under God, to the earnest labors of the Pastors' College men, are such as to fill sympathizing hearts with gladness. The total number baptized from the commencement is over 90,000 and the total increase of these churches during the same period exceeds 150,000. The whole Baptist denomination has increased at a much smaller rate than the churches connected with the Pastors' College." Ibid., 148.

W. Y. Fullerton, one of the college's preeminent graduates:

Our field has been as wide in the denominations it has embraced as the localities it has included. Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, and the Society of Friends, have in turn been visited, besides many public halls ; among them may be mentioned the immense St. George's Hall, in Bradford, which, during our mission there in September last, was frequently used and filled. We have not preached in any Episcopalian Church, or Salvation Army Barracks, or Brethren's Room, though many from all these sections have attended the meetings. Our work is thus truly catholic; not undenominational, but inter-denominational; and in this connection we cannot speak too highly of the effective aid rendered by the various Y. M. C. A's. and Y. W. C. A's., and kindred institutions, with which we have been brought in contact.<sup>42</sup>

In the American context as a whole, religion driven by entrepreneurs tended to become commodified as one cultural activity among others.<sup>43</sup> Laurence Moore summarized the self-propagating nature of entrepreneurial narratives in this way:

Most innovative avenues of religious influence involved religion in certain processes of commodification. The very effort to create a demand for religion committed revivalism to a market logic and ultimately to market strategies. In the early nineteenth century, clerical authority declined measurably *vis-à-vis* competing sources of authority.... hegemony did not come easily for anyone. Precisely because clerics could not take their authority for granted, they embarked on a course of remarkable religious and cultural inventiveness.<sup>44</sup>

The trend of commodification accelerates in parity with developments in communication and transportation technologies that are likewise interwoven into ecclesiological narratives. Premillennial eschatology, in particular, contributes to an extraordinarily positive view of technology as every new means of mass communication is lauded as a more effective tool for leading people to Christ and building unity among his followers.<sup>45</sup> Quentin Schultze traces a brief history of evangelical utilization of technology, noting its reliance on an underlying system of bureaucratic, managerial organization distinct from the public narrative of techno-eschatological optimism.<sup>46</sup> More significantly, Schultze observes that radio broadcasts had an additional effect of exacerbating the distance between preacher and listener that the practice of itinerancy and revival meetings had already initiated.<sup>47</sup> If a person could once hear the word preached as an individual in a crowd, they could now do so quite literally alone.

Though tract societies and other groups had to compete for public attention in other forms of print media, it was really the government regulation of the burgeoning field of radio that cultivating large audiences became essential. Once the Federal Radio Commission created the criterion of "public interest" in contrast to "special interest" under which religious broadcasts were generally classified, radio ministries had strong incentives to demonstrate their broad appeal

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 154-155.

<sup>43</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). This notably traces the history of entrepreneurial ideas. A comprehensive statistical account purporting to demonstrate Smith's assessment appears in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's *The Churched of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 64-65.

<sup>45</sup> Quentin J. Schultze, *Christianity and the Mass Media in America: Toward a Democratic Accommodation* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 60.

<sup>46</sup> This dates back to at least the American Tract Society. Ibid., 72.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 61.

to a variety of Christians that encouraged the development of entertainment and educational offerings alongside explicitly religious content.<sup>48</sup> Those ministries that did not manage to secure their own frequency could compete for designated religious airtime on commercial stations, prompting even more intense competition out of which celebrity-evangelists began to emerge.<sup>49</sup> These trends both echoed and accelerated earlier affirmations of theatrical and marketing techniques as well as the sense that Christian unity was expressed primarily in the resonance of a transdenominational audience with the message of the true gospel. A similar case could be made for television and possibly communication forms arising on the internet.

By the time Donald McGavran published *Bridges of God* in 1955, techno-scientific-capitalist impulses had already been driving entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives for some time. His innovation was to apply scientific analysis systematically with the express purpose of developing theories that would produce better techniques for growth. The propagation of his approach was facilitated by the founding of the Institute for Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in 1960, its move to Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965, and its attraction of new leadership in Peter Wagner and John Wimber. More importantly, it began developing a growing collection of practitioners, including Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, John Maxwell, Doug Murren, and Ed Young, who had risen to prominence through the application of church growth techniques.<sup>50</sup> But the influence of the church growth movement on American ecclesiology is not simply anecdotal, as if these figures were exceptional in the same ways as their predecessors. The upsurge of churches with attendance of two-thousand or more each weekend that began in the 1970's continues to accelerate.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, the church growth movement continued to affirm the unity project on its own terms—as a subset of the project of world evangelization. Thom Rainer describes the church growth movement's unitive function as an expression of the spirit of a “new ecumenism” present at the 1974 meeting of the International Congress of World Evangelization at Lausanne. Church growth, he writes,

claims supporters from virtually all denominations and bodies of believers, especially in North America.... The modern era of church growth has unified believers from diverse Christian backgrounds whose priorities are evangelizing and growing churches by adding ‘Great Commission disciples.’<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, Rainer notes the connection between scientific management and McGavran's admittedly fallible approach to “measuring” salvation: “the Church Growth Movement arose when salvation became *quantifiable*”—a method interpreted theologically as “accountability.”<sup>53</sup> It is likewise significant that when a minority of Lausanne participants criticized the separation of social ministry and evangelism,<sup>54</sup> Peter Wagner responded by arguing on the basis of *scarcity of resources* that one *must* be prioritized and invoked a narrative of mainline decline to illustrate the negative consequences of focusing on the “cultural mandate” rather than the “evangelistic mandate.”<sup>55</sup> The *Manila Manifesto* would later recommend that every congregation ought to carry out regular studies “not only of its own membership and program but of its local community in

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<sup>48</sup> Schultze considers the case of Moody Bible Institute's WMBI, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's KFUE, and Aimee Semple McPherson's KFSG, pp.149-151.

<sup>49</sup> Schultze presents Paul Rader as an early example, p.153.

<sup>50</sup> Rainer, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Scott Thumma and Dave Tavis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Rainer, 66.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>54</sup> *Lausanne Covenant*, <http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html> (accessed 9 January, 2008), §5-6.

<sup>55</sup> Rainer, 156-158.



all its particularity, in order to develop appropriate strategies for mission.”<sup>56</sup>

### III: Critiques of Entrepreneurism and the Impulses That Give Rise to It

The church growth movement has generally attracted three basic critiques: insufficient concern for social justice, overemphasis on quantitative analysis, and hubris in seeming to deny other ways of bearing witness. Though Rainer highlights several specific critiques that he suggests Wagner responded to with *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* in 1981,<sup>57</sup> his assessment precedes fifteen years of techno-scientific-capitalist acceleration—notably coinciding with the period of political change Philip Bobbitt identifies as the dawn of the market-state. Consideration of more recent critics of entrepreneurial ecclesologies reveals several themes essential to bringing such narratives into dialogue with *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.

In *Consuming Jesus*, Paul Louis Metzger juxtaposes stone (eucharistic) altars of joy through suffering with coffee-bars of leisure and privilege, arguing that the dangerous combination of “trickle-down social ethics” and premillennial eschatology with consumerism, upward mobility, and the homogenous-unit principle produces an inability to perceive racial and class divisions, encourages anti-structural bias, and cultivates “small groups” that are little more than affinity-based social networks.<sup>58</sup> He notes that though the emerging church functions as a “radical alternative to the megachurch phenomenon” it has not demonstrated a capacity to overcome this critique either.<sup>59</sup> Metzger’s multidimensional response to the disorder he identifies ultimately looks to the eucharist as the solution—particularly in terms of prefiguring the eschatological banquet in which scarcity is forever abolished. He speculates about “the possible connection between churches given to upwardly mobile, homogenous tendencies and their infrequent celebration of and lack of attention to the Lord’s Supper”<sup>60</sup> and advocates a common table in which Christians consume and are consumed by Christ as a concrete step towards overcoming racial and class division. The connections he makes between the various elements of disorder furthermore suggest that a more extensive treatment of techno-scientific-capitalist impulses might explore their function among groups who rejected *evolutionary biology* as a legitimate tool for interpreting Genesis 1 while continuing to accept the pseudo-scientific category of *race* as a legitimate reading of Genesis 4 or 9.<sup>61</sup>

Metzger is not alone in focusing on the eucharist as means of resisting capitalist impulses (or at least escaping its vices). After a nod to the importance of the four classical marks of the church for theological economics and discussion of the difference between contracts and gifts,<sup>62</sup> Stephen Long proposes a similar strategy:

The church itself desperately searches for the right niche market to sell its wares, and we are all too willing to forget who we are for the sake of market shares. This is precisely why the repetition of the liturgical performance of the Eucharist and the bringing forth of our own offering can be a radical political act.<sup>63</sup>

While the idea that “the Eucharist is the gift that obligates its consumers to love one’s neighbor” has obvious possibilities for calling others into the kind of gift-exchange he envisions, his use of

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<sup>56</sup> *Manila Manifesto*, <http://www.lausanne.org/manila-1989/manila-manifesto.html> (accessed 9 January, 2008), §8.

<sup>57</sup> Rainer, 59.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 55-67.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>61</sup> As in interpreting the “mark of Cain” as darker skin tone or taking Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth as corresponding with “Caucasoid,” “Negroid,” and “Mongoloid.”

<sup>62</sup> D. Stephen Long and Nancy Ruth Fox with Tripp York, *Calculated Futures: Theology, Ethics, and Economics* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 185-201.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

it to signify God as “the one resource that denies scarcity and rejects competition”<sup>64</sup> may in fact problematize the eucharist for members of a divided church who whose convictions impel them to restrict its use. Though Christ is inexhaustible, it would be difficult to argue that limitations on eucharistic sharing are not a *kind* of scarcity. Ironically, many of the churches who appear most influenced by capitalist impulses are also the most likely to declare God’s abundant table open for all who would come. Consideration of this fact suggests that entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives ought not be dismissed as the puppet-strings of culture instead of attempts to respond faithfully to the gospel with a capacity for prophetic transformation. It may be that the grounding of entrepreneurial narratives in the project of the great commission functions as an internal check on unrestricted capitulation to techno-scientific-capitalism despite their problematic tendencies to undermine organizational norms of projects, like unity, that are considered subsidiary.

Of course, churches that embrace entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives are not the only ones who come up for criticism along these lines. As Catholic laymen, Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow address the extraordinarily limited efforts at Christian formation in the face of an overwhelming volume of advertising that breaks ties between symbols and their referents through constant reformulation and recombination of meaning as cultural product,<sup>65</sup> noting the Church of England’s increased use of market research and advertisement<sup>66</sup> as well as Vatican debates about the extent to which the liturgy could be modified for television.<sup>67</sup> More pointedly, they criticize the argument presented in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) as being “in significant sections... indistinguishable” from John Locke<sup>68</sup>—a property they regard as highly dangerous because it leaves the church vulnerable to capitalist impulses:

By accepting the fundamental theoretical basis of political/social liberalism, the church finds itself committed to accept the contemporary manifestation of market economics as well as its view of the person, self-realization, consumption, and everything else that view implies.<sup>69</sup>

Their solution is to experiment with creative ways of embodying the sermon on the mount in order to cultivate a “economics of discipleship” that pairs church-as-*polis* with church-as-*oikos*. This entails, in part, a renewed emphasis on *place* contra capitalism’s tendency to render geography (as well as culture) irrelevant<sup>70</sup>—an assessment that calls to mind discussions of the mobility of the population as early as 1957 at Oberlin I.<sup>71</sup> Notably, like Finney’s critique of *mechanization* in order to affirm *innovation*, Budde and Brimlow seem to suggest entrepreneurship itself may provide a means of transcending techno-scientific-capitalist impulses in their assertion that “poverty of imagination and experimentation” is a consequence of the church’s capitulation to cultural capitalism.<sup>72</sup>

Murray Jardine takes Budde and Brimlow’s broad comments on the influence of Lockean categories further by situating his history of liberalism in the context of four technological revolutions: the printing press, textile production and the steam engine, electricity and the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow, *Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 68-69.

<sup>66</sup> This claim is explored at substantially greater depth by Richard H. Roberts who accuses the Church of England with “uncritical assimilation of managerial power and ‘mission’, and the problematic representation of managerialism as the restoration of the lost potency of the Gospel.” *Religion, Theology, and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 296.

<sup>67</sup> Budde and Brimlow, 80-82.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 109-129.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Servier Minear, ed., *The Nature of the Unity We Seek: Official report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958).

<sup>72</sup> Budde and Brimlow, 177.

internal combustion engine, and computers along with associated technologies. He argues that techno-scientific-capitalist impulses led to a highly productive society that fostered a consumer culture in which expressive individualism flourished generating a consequent moral confusion. Through this trajectory God-given creativity unleashes unpredictable destructive potential. Jardine's solution ignores classical marks of the church to discuss Christian communities in terms of "biblical anthropology" that has the capacity to "make sense of human creative capacities and their technological manifestations."<sup>73</sup> Like Budde and Brimlow, he invokes Aristotelian *polis*, but frames it in terms of speech-acts grounded in *place* that have been lost through technologies favoring visualization (printed text as well as multimedia) over face-to-face communication. A summary of his dense argument is worth quoting at length:

what is required is the formation of local communities that can put the biblical understanding of human agency into practice to develop an alternative to liberal capitalist democracy as it approaches its collapse. This would mean developing a culture that embodies the virtues of faith, hope, and love through such places as a democratized *polis*, apprenticeship, ritual, prophecy, and narrative, which can concretely set limits on human action even in a situation where humans have discovered that they have a very substantial creative capacity.... In order to establish such places... it will be essential to reconstruct face-to-face communities where people actually do talk to each other more. Such a project can be begun by restructuring urban environments, reducing hours of work, and providing personalized care for the elderly and dying.<sup>74</sup>

In a critique more specifically directed at megachurches, with some comments to addressed to the emerging church movement, David Fitch argues that evangelicals have "forfeited the practices that constitute being the church either (a) by portioning them off to various concerns exterior to the church or (b) by compromising them so badly that they are no longer recognizable as being functions of the church."<sup>75</sup> He summarizes the influence of techno-science as a subset of the pursuit of efficiency that he links with modernist epistemological emphasis on individual reason and experience. Like Jardine, his solution is more robust than that of Metzger or Long in that it articulates eight sets of practices<sup>76</sup> intended to resist techno-scientific-capitalist impulses, but is limited by framing critiques in terms of "complicity with modernity" as if a shift to postmodernity (conceived as the erosion of social and intellectual assumptions of modernity) signaled the diminishment of such impulses rather than expansion and acceleration.<sup>77</sup> Fitch envisions unity as return to core "practices of being Christ's body," but

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<sup>73</sup> Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity From Itself* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 279.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> David Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 13.

<sup>76</sup> These include measuring faithfulness rather than "decisions," treating the church as the center of evangelism, connecting the pastorate to virtues, including liturgy and art in worship, cultivating faithful hearing of scripture, encouraging economic justice, returning to confession, and enhancing churches' capacity to raise faithful children. Each set is elaborated at the end of a chapter.

<sup>77</sup> Fitch admits a sometimes imprecise use of "postmodernity" and maintains a critical stance towards "late capitalism" as defined by Frederic Jameson but does make explicit Jameson's description of the postmodern as: "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call 'intensities' – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system; and, after a brief account of postmodernist mutations in the lived experience of built space itself, some reflections on the mission of political art in the bewildering new world space of late or multinational capital." Frederic Jameson,

claims only to have initiated a conversation about *which* constitute the core for contemporary North America, not to have articulated a consensus or provided comprehensive account.<sup>78</sup> Like Budde and Brimlow, rather than rejecting entrepreneurial approaches, Fitch seems to encourage them in expressing a desire that small congregations proliferate sufficiently to rival the cultural function of Starbucks and delineates their boundaries according to core practices rather than other ecclesiological norms.<sup>79</sup>

Though entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives may be credited with producing the explosion of megachurches, the above survey makes clear that they are not the only churches influenced by techno-scientific-capitalist impulses. Nevertheless, it is important to pair such critiques with the qualitative research of Scott Thumma and Dave Tavis published under the auspices of the Leadership Network. Their book, *Beyond Megachurch Myths* challenges popular conceptions of megachurches as homogeneous, sheep-stealing, cults of personality that water down faith and are destined to disappear since they are hated by young-people. The success of megachurches, they suggest, comes from “their ability to read and adapt to the changing patterns and cultural needs of contemporary society.... Megachurches seem to have the willingness and aptitude to try, fail, and abandon ideas that are not working and then try something else.”<sup>80</sup> Though the book makes a number of important contributions, the most significant insight may be a brief description of the nuanced way in which megachurch pastors think about their church as “a mental model that classifies the attendees by commitment level.”<sup>81</sup> Their data suggests that attendees for each week can be classified as “the core (5 percent), the committed (15 percent), moderate members (40 percent), marginal persons (30 percent), and infrequent attendees, visitors, and spectators (10 percent).”<sup>82</sup> Thumma and Tavis argue that while pastors of most churches know that persons in their congregation has varying levels of commitment, they tend to preach (and presumably engage in other forms of ministry) with the static categories of a believer/unbeliever binary in mind. Megachurch pastors, on the other hand, are more intentional about moving people from lower to higher levels of commitment—with intensifying demands for strictness as one moves up the scale.<sup>83</sup> Consciousness of this dynamic makes three observations possible. The first is that it undermines traditional conceptions of membership as previous participation in a particular ritual (baptism). Second, it means that while those who are on the edges of megachurches certainly do operate as consumers, those toward the center operate more in terms of participants in a gift-exchange where they offer an unspecified amount of time and money for an unspecified (and perhaps unquantifiable) return. Third, the extension of this conception of the relationship between individual and congregation to the relationship of the local body to other entities seems likely to produce exactly the sort of complex layers of memberships, patronage, and participation in networks that such churches actually engage in.

The mega-church conception of levels of participation does not seem fundamentally different from an emerging conversation comprised of those who choose to be active in it within a broad set of behavioral norms. The origin of Emergent Village out of conferences funded by the Leadership Network, whatever the present state of relations between the two organizations, should not be overlooked. Though divergent on obvious organizational norms, even if the emerging church conversation is interpreted primarily as a critique of the megachurch model, its technological capacities, employment of network theory, and structural dependence on individual

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*Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1991), online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/jameson.htm> (accessed 1 February, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> Fitch, 228.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>80</sup> Thumma and Tavis, 183.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Notably, the variable attendance of the lower marginal and infrequent 40 percent means that considerably more persons consider it “their church” than would attend on any given week. *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

voluntary activity may mean it simply expresses the latest modulation of techno-scientific-capitalist impulses. It is not clear that Morgenthauer's rejection of "entrepreneurial" as a synonym for "business" means anything more than a rejection of *mass* marketing for *niche* (or *micro-niche*) marketing. The capacity of the conversation to undermine traditional norms is expressed nowhere more succinctly than the adjectival stream:

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<sup>84</sup>

#### IV: The Nature and Mission of the Church

Once this general framework of entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives has been articulated, it becomes possible to bring it into dialogue with *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (hereafter, NMC). At the present stage, areas of resonance are matched by significant areas of dissonance and nonsonance.<sup>85</sup> As already noted, there is a strong resonance between the prioritization of the Matthew 28 commission with the revival tradition and the affirmation of evangelization as the "foremost task of the church" in NMC.<sup>86</sup> This is reflected throughout the document in language of proclamation, witness, and inviting others to repent and be baptized. The assertion that "There is no single pattern of conferring ministry in the New Testament. The Spirit has at different times led the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs"<sup>87</sup> would not be out of place within entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives, even if churches work out the implications differently.

Such differences may be rooted in significant areas of dissonance concerning NMC's articulation of the nature of the church in terms of the phrase *creatura verbi et creatura spiritus* and significant biblical images of the church. While the eucharist-centered critiques of Metzger and Long clearly resonate with this understanding and its consequent focus on baptism, eucharist, and ministry, there are elements that seem foreign to those who espouse entrepreneurial ecclesiology through the church growth movement and some critics arguing for further adaptation. One subtle example is the possible intersection between the idea of the church as *creatura verbi* and Jardine's focus on speech-based place, but notably, NMC accents the Johannine Word of incarnation<sup>88</sup> rather than the God-speech of Genesis that brought all things into existence and endowed humans with the creative capacity that is the focus of Jardine's analysis.

More significant is the assertion that four images in particular, "people of God', 'Body of Christ', 'Temple of the Holy Spirit', and 'koinonia'.... taken together... illuminate the New Testament vision of the Church in relation to the Triune God", adding that "A fully rounded approach... requires the use and interaction of all biblical images" which it lists as "'vine', 'flock', 'bride', 'household' and 'covenant community')"<sup>89</sup> Though diverse in some senses, these metaphors all suggest a passive rather than active image of the church. For instance, there is little to suggest that body with Christ as its head given life by the Spirit and *enabled* to be used<sup>90</sup> is not carrying out its regular biological functions while fully asleep. Though the Spirit is active in the

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<sup>84</sup> Brian McLaren, *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* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> The analytic categories of resonance, dissonance, and nonsonance were developed by John T. Ford, "Theological Language and Ecumenical Methodology," in *Ancient Faith and American Born Churches: Dialogues Between Christian Traditions* ed. Ted A. Campbell, Ann K. Riggs and Gilbert W. Stafford (Paulist Press, 2005), 15-23.

<sup>86</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, §110.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, §87.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, §10.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, §17.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, §20-21.

temple, the activity of the apostles who “witness... pray, love, work and serve”<sup>91</sup> appears at variance with the architectural metaphor. Koinonia is more complex since it is used ecumenically to encompass such a diverse collection of connotations. As “rooted in the order of creation itself and... realized in part in natural relationships of family and kinship, of tribe and people”<sup>92</sup> koinonia seems to include positive interaction between any two extant entities whatsoever. As articulated in terms of its verbal form, *acting-together* is overwhelmed by the *having-in-common*, *sharing*, *participating*, *having-part-in*, and *contractual* senses of koinonia—and even then each is expressed in its *infinitive* rather than *present participle* form.<sup>93</sup> When participles finally appear, “receiving... sharing... breaking... praying... serving... participating... giving... proclaiming... witnessing... and working”<sup>94</sup> are not constitutive actions but *signs* of communion. Even the active nature of “pilgrimage” as a central feature of being the “people of God” is made stationary by framing it in terms of *fulfillment* of the Abrahamic promise or eschatological eternal *rest*.<sup>95</sup> In each, the active components (when they appear) are subsumed by the weight of a passive metaphor in a way that they would not be if attention were directed towards accounts of Jesus’ pattern of ministry demonstrated in sending out the seventy<sup>96</sup> and articulating the Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria-ends of the earth pattern<sup>97</sup> that gives rise to entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives.

Furthermore, even though NMC describes change as something “which allows for both positive development and growth as well as for the negative possibility of decline and distortion”, its location as the first bullet on a list of things the church is “exposed to” suggests a fundamental aversion to “change” in parity with aversion to “individual, cultural and historical conditioning” and aversion to “the power of sin.”<sup>98</sup> The combination of the static conception of the church expressed metaphorically and the implicit aversion to change may explain why the values of creativity and experimentation that feature prominently in entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives (even those that are self-critical about the influence of techno-scientific-capitalist impulses) are wholly absent.

In addition to such dissonance, the way NMC uses the word “belonging” entails at least one area of nonsonance. While belonging can be conceived of as an ontological reality, megachurches and emerging church communities tend to approach it as a psychological or communally determined reality. In identifying “belonging without believing” as a *problem*, NMC appears to use the phrase to denote persons who possess “membership” in some technical sense but who make little or no participatory contribution to a local congregation. If this is what is implied, churches in both mega and emerging forms use this phrase in nearly an opposite sense to describe those who make ongoing participatory contribution to a Christian community without aligning themselves with the core doctrinal affirmations of the community. For such communities, an abstract conception of membership that makes it possible to distinguish between status within a community and participation in that community appears out of place and may be a contemporary analog to the sixteenth century problem of absentee bishops, though with respect to the laity rather than the episcopate. Similarly, the subsequent assertion that “all who belong” should be “seriously committed Christians” seems to suggest it is not possible for belonging itself to become a means to believing. For communities that measure belonging in terms of participation, the NMC formulation may leave insufficient space for gradual, asynchronous change. As Thumma and Tavis’ research demonstrates, the idea of progression to

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., §23.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., §25.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., §28.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., §32.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., §19.

<sup>96</sup> Luke 10:1-12.

<sup>97</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>98</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, §50. A similar case might be made concerning “individual, cultural and historical conditioning” despite being likewise described in both positive and negative terms.

deeper levels of intimacy and commitment is central to the understanding of mission espoused by many megachurches. A more radical version of this idea within the emerging church conversation increases the complexity by rejecting the idea of progression.<sup>99</sup>

## V. Visions of the Future

The focus thus far on past and present is slightly ironic since entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives are concerned primarily with the future. Significantly, it is not a distant eschatological future, but the realizable future (and in pre-millennial varieties, one that could be punctuated at any moment by Christ's return). Driven as they are by techno-scientific-capitalist impulses, such narratives are more obviously bound to *contemporary* forms of social-political organization than older ecclesiological constructions. Rather than denying that this is the case, the narratives actually affirm it through an implicit claim that *all* ecclesiologies bear certain resemblances to the social-political worlds in which they arise. It is precisely this claim that is at work in undermining prior ecclesiological norms in favor of innovations or pseudo-innovations. While this charge has some obvious connections to the notion of a Constantinian shift, it is appropriate here to concentrate attention on Protestants for which Philip Bobbitt, whose work has already been alluded to, provides an indispensable lens.

In *The Shield of Achilles*, Bobbitt depicts a sequence of structural changes that took place in the development of modern states as a morphology of constitutional orders from *princely-state* to *market-state*. Framing such changes as the outworking of epochal wars, of which the conflicts of the twentieth century comprise the most recent, Bobbitt suggests:

In such wars, successful innovations—either strategic or constitutional—by a single state are copied by other, competing states. This state mimicry sweeps through the society of states and results in the sudden shift in constitutional orders and strategic paradigms in the aftermath of an epochal war.<sup>100</sup>

While churches and states, of course, are radically different, Bobbitt's ordering of history according to constitutional orders with differing bases for legitimacy correlates with the history of Protestantism in interesting ways. Bobbitt's first order, the *princely-state*, begins with Charles VIII's invasion of Italy in 1494 and asserts that "The State confers legitimacy on the dynasty." For the *kingly-state*, that begins to rise from the Dutch Revolt of 1567, this situation is reversed so that the dynasty confers legitimacy on the state. It is notable that the first precedes the rise of Martin Luther by roughly the same span as the second precedes that of Jacob Arminius. The *territorial-state*, that Bobbitt dates beginning in 1649, is legitimated by its capacity to "manage the country efficiently." It is hardly a surprise that within the context of colonial North America, Wesley and Whitefield innovate in ways that enable them to minister effectively in expanding territory. The shift from *state-nation* founded in the American Revolution legitimated by its mandate to "forge the identity of the nation" to *nation-state* following the American Civil War with a mandate to "better the welfare of the nation" may display similar correlates with the organizational forms of Finney and Spurgeon and the rise of Free Methodists and Salvationists. Bobbitt concludes his morphology by identifying the early 1990's as the beginning of a *market-state* model that "exists to maximize the opportunities enjoyed by all members of society."<sup>101</sup>

Clearly, an opportunity-maximizing form of organization looks more like megachurches than traditional ecclesiological forms but that does not *necessarily* imply that the opportunities in question concern self-indulgence rather than missional experimentation. For churches attuned to their own risk of captivity to cultural impulses who conceive of unity as a project, what is the significance that the World Council of Churches was conceived of and founded in the midst of

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<sup>99</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>100</sup> Bobbitt, 68.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

Bobbitt's "Long War" of the twentieth century? His argument that the conflict concerning whether *fascism*, *communism*, or *parliamentarianism* would become the dominant form of nation-state is now superceded by a choice between whether a *mercantile-garden* (concerned primarily with the "sublime"), an *entrepreneurial-meadow* (concerned primarily with efficiency), or a *managerial-park* (concerned primarily with justice) will become the dominant form of the rising market-state<sup>102</sup> is of central concern for the shape ecumenism will take in the twenty-first century. This is particularly true in light of predictions concerning increasing influence for churches where entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives seem to carry significant weight.<sup>103</sup>

An initial foray into this line of inquiry might begin with consideration of two predictions Bobbitt makes about the future as a means of illuminating some challenges and opportunities posed by techno-scientific-capitalist impulses. First, he predicts the age of market-states will display three paradoxes:

- (1) it will require a more centralized authority for government, but all governments will be weaker, having greatly contracted the scope of their undertakings, having devolved or lost authority to so many other institutions...
- (2) there will be more public participation in government, but it will count for less, and thus the role of citizen *qua* citizen will greatly diminish and the role of citizen as spectator will increase;
- (3) the welfare state will have greatly retrenched, but infrastructure, security, epidemiological surveillance, and environmental protection... will be promoted by the State as never before.<sup>104</sup>

Most churches seem to be facing the weakening influence of ecclesiastical authority—not simply between denominational offices and megachurches but also within structures of *episkopé*. Similarly, the increasing role of lay-leaders in many churches may turn out to count for less if NMC's concern about members who do not believe is well-placed. Among megachurches, even if persons are ushered into increasingly deeper levels of commitment, larger numbers of congregants mean more spectators than participants so that some leave to pursue more participatory models within an emerging church paradigm. Third, as churches gain increased capacity for gathering data about personal needs they seem to provide less personal pastoral care. The rise of the market-state does not necessarily entail a present or eventual dominance of entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives. The condition of existing in a society of market-states simply means that churches can expect to work out their faith and order in an environment in which techno-scientific-capitalist impulses are increasingly influential.

Bobbitt's second prediction builds on his first to suggest that concerning the categories of "security," "culture," and "economics," it is impossible to say which of the three market-state models will perform best overall, but it is possible to predict that the *entrepreneurial* model will produce the worst outcome for culture, the *managerial* model will produce the worst economic outcome, and the *mercantile* model will produce the worst outcome for security.<sup>105</sup> If churches conducted a parallel thought experiment using the categories of "doctrine" as the content of faith, "practice" as the degree to which that content is actualized, and "formation" as the capacity for self-replication, it is not clear even what typology would move this line of inquiry further. Does the Orthodox-Catholic-Protestant triad lend itself to such analysis? Would the expanded "theological families" dividing Protestants into Historic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, and Racial/Ethnic categories be more fruitful? Perhaps a closer parallel to Bobbitt's analysis might look like "entrepreneurial," "reformational," and "ancient," where the first performs poorly in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>103</sup> I am thinking here of Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) as well as Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Bobbitt, 234.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 721-722.



doctrine, the second in formation, and the third in practice. Though such a caricatured approach seems uncomplimentary in all directions, the task of articulating where it goes wrong may provide new tools for addressing such insoluble problems as which of these categories could be sacrificed for the sake of unity.

Though entrepreneurial ecclesiological narratives may threaten to undermine ecumenism as much as any other ecclesiological norm, churches who espouse them view experimentation as the creative work of beings endowed with the image of a creator God and called to extend their most extraordinary efforts towards making disciples. Attentiveness to techno-scientific-capitalist impulses enables such narratives to persist through cultural changes despite the apparent insubstantiality produced by its internal logic undermining any specific concrete form. But if the social-political pattern has now shifted or is in process of shifting to a society of market-states, the increasing number of churches that adopt such narratives may paradoxically find themselves in position of cultural dominance. It may be that a new wave of experimentation to rival that of early twentieth-century ecumenism will be fresh wind and fire in the church's long struggle. Even so, how it might be possible to do so with a view of God's plenitude rather than scarcities of various kinds is a matter requiring serious discernment. If the critiques summarized in section three share anything in common, it is the implication that if the willingness of ecclesiological entrepreneurs to experiment with new forms in a changing social and political environment is an ecumenical gift, it is certainly one best exercised in a communion of mutual accountability.