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"So Now What?" Using the New Science to Design a Flexible and Adaptable Spiritual Growth Process for New and Returning Believers in the Local Church

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**"So Now What?"
Using the New Science
to Design a Flexible and Adaptable Spiritual Growth Process
for New and Returning Believers
in the Local Church**

**Presented to
the Faculty of George Fox Evangelical Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
Christine A. Prescott
Dr. Charles J. Conniry, Jr., Advisor
March 2005**

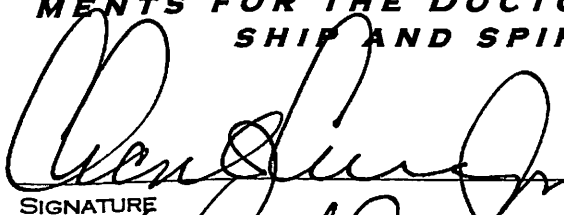
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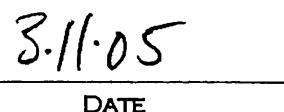
**TITLE: "SO NOW WHAT?" USING THE NEW SCIENCE TO
DESIGN A FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE SPIRITUAL
GROWTH PROCESS FOR NEW AND RETURNING
BELIEVERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

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GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

To
David and Rhonna, Dallas and Karen,
Christine, Dave, Sherry
and Dave
for your encouragement

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the need for spiritual-growth opportunities in the local church for new adult Christians and those adults who are returning to the church after years of absence. This dissertation will identify concepts from the ‘new science’ of quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and complexity theory to suggest elements for the creation of a flexible and adaptable spiritual-growth process.

I use the New Testament to address two assumptions of the thesis: that the spiritual growth of followers of Jesus Christ is a process of spiritual transformation that rests not a one-time conversion event but occurs over a lifetime of dynamic growth, and that the spiritual growth of believers is designed to occur in community with other believers, in the church. I next examine the new science of quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and complexity theory and derive six concepts from them that a local church could use in designing a spiritual-growth process.

I then examine the catechumenate of the early centuries of the church (particularly Augustine’s *De Catechizandis Rudibus*), the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, John Wesley’s class meetings, and the Willow Creek Community Church small-group model to discern ways in which the church has tried to help new believers in the church to grow in their relationship to Jesus Christ. I consider ways in which these models interface with the six concepts from the new science set out in chapter four as well as additional insights that these models offer. In the last chapter, I use

an example to suggest the kind of process that I envision. I apply the six concepts proposed from the new science, ideas from the historical models studied, and ideas from the example to propose elements for the creation of a spiritual-growth process.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY PROBLEM NARRATIVE

Mary and Sam, a married couple in their mid-30s, and their two children, aged 5 and 2, are typical visitors to the Sapphire Community Church. The church is located near Missoula, Montana, a university town with a population of about 60,000. The area is growing rapidly as it provides a 'country' life with easy access to urban amenities. Sam and Mary have recently purchased a home near the church.

Most of the adults who attend the Sapphire Community Church have advanced degrees and several work or worked for the Forest Service in management positions. Some own their own businesses or work in professional positions such as teaching at the university level and in public schools, nursing, and a variety of other professional work. Mary does not currently working outside the home and Sam owns his own contracting business.

Sam and Mary and their children have been attending the church for several months. They attend the 11:00 A.M. service that runs concurrently with the Sunday school hour. Erin, the 5-year-old, loves the kindergarten class. Mary approached the pastor about what how they could become church members.

Mary: "Pastor, my husband Sam and I really like your church. What do we have to do to become members?"

Pastor: "You only have to have been baptized in some Christian church

at some time in the past.”

Mary: “Well, I grew up in the Lutheran church and stopped attending after I went off to college. Sam was raised Catholic.”

Pastor: “Have you two been attending any church since you were married?”

Mary: “Well, no, not really. Now that Erin is ready to start school we thought our children needed to go to Sunday school. And since we have been coming here, Sam and I have lots of questions about our faith. We aren’t sure if Jesus is really real or not. We just aren’t sure what we believe.”

So now what? Are Sam and Mary Christians? Their belief in Jesus Christ is so tenuous as to be negligible. They want to believe but are not sure what believing really means. The pastor’s dilemma is that despite Sam and Mary’s ambivalence of belief, the church constitution requires that, upon their profession of faith before the congregation, Sam and Mary will become church members. Although this is a ‘teachable moment’ for Sam and Mary, there are no groups or programs in the church to help them to explore their faith and to rediscover Jesus Christ.

A local Catholic who felt that the area needed to have a Protestant church founded the church in 1883. Sapphire Community Church was restarted in the 1950s after years of being closed. The four local families who were instrumental in restarting the church came from various religious backgrounds. It was important to these families that the church would include all Christians and that one could have one’s infant baptized or dedicated. Therefore, the church strongly considers itself to be interdenominational. An important part of Sapphire Community Church’s culture

is that the only requirement for becoming a church member is that the prospective member has been baptized in any Christian denomination or tradition.

The church is always within sight of its past. The original church building, referred to as the 'little church,' still stands within view of the current church building. The church worshipped at the little church until the new church building, approximately 500 feet south of the little church, was built in December 1988. The church currently has 140 members and averages 180 in worship in two Sunday services.

The Marys and Sams who are coming back to the church need to come to know Jesus as he is, not as they remember him in their vague childhood recollections. Other new believers are also coming to the church from Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses and some have never been involved in church before. Dallas Willard defines this ministry problem:

Our very zeal and success in this area [the geographical and numerical growth of the church] may deflect us from an adequate emphasis upon the understanding and practice of growth in Christlikeness *after* conversion. Have we done what is necessary to bring the earnest convert into his or her possessions as a child of God, as a brother or sister of Jesus Christ in the new life?¹

Can the church provide opportunities for the spiritual growth of new believers and those rediscovering and discovering Jesus that will be flexible enough to take into account the different backgrounds and questions of the new believers? Can the design of these spiritual-growth opportunities be flexible and adaptable to help individuals cope in a rapidly changing world?

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988; reprint, San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 15.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

In her book *Leadership and the New Science*, consultant Margaret Wheatley uses concepts from the new science (chaos theory, quantum mechanics and complexity theory) to explore how organizations can function more effectively in a complex and changing world.¹ As I read this book I thought about traditional discipleship programs in the church that seemed to be, once they were begun, cast in concrete. I wondered whether discipleship programs for new believers in the church could be created to be flexible and adaptable, to enable spiritual formation rather than constrain it. More particularly, could the new science be used to design a discipleship process for new believers in the local church that would be flexible and easy to change?

I will show in this dissertation that we can deduce concepts from the new science that can be used to help a local church to create a flexible and adaptable process for facilitating the spiritual growth of new and returning believers. In this dissertation, the use of the term ‘new believers’ will include both first-time believers and believers returning to the church after years of absence.

Concepts from the ‘new science’ are the core of the process. Physicist and philosopher Danah Zohar defines the new science:

The four new sciences of this century—relativity, quantum mechanics, chaos, and complexity theory—are all different. Each best describes

¹ ¹Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999).

great speeds; quantum mechanics describes the very small world within the atom. Chaos and complexity apply to physical systems on our everyday level of reality, things like the weather, the flow of streams, the beat of the human heart. . . . In the new science, the quantum paradigm, nature is seen as complex, chaotic, and uncertain.²

Although a nexus between the new science and theology has been discussed since 1991³, concepts from the new science have been applied to the local church in limited ways. In chapter three I address why concepts from the new science can be used to inform the praxis of the local church. I then set out and discuss six concepts I have identified from the principles of quantum theory, chaos theory and complexity theory.

I was interested in studying how the church has facilitated the spiritual growth of new believers and how these methods interfaced with the six concepts from the new science that I had discerned. Determining which models to study posed a problem, because in most models that I considered, facilitating the spiritual growth of new believers was not a primary concern. I chose four models. The first model I examine is the catechumenate of the early church with a special focus on Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. I next consider the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius. Although the *Exercises* are not intended for new believers, Ignatius was concerned about the spiritual ignorance of those in the church. He therefore suggests ways in which the *Exercises* can be used to facilitate the spiritual growth of those in the church who are not well informed about the basics of the Christian faith. I then discuss John Wesley's class meetings and, finally, the small group system of Willow Creek Community Church. I consider how each model has incorporated one or more of the six concepts I have discerned from the new science as

² Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain: Using the New Science to Rethink How We Structure and Lead Organizations* (San Francisco, CA: Gerrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997), 42, 3.

³ This discussion took place at a conference at the Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo. Robert John Russell, introduction to *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy and Arthur R. Peacocke, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications; Berkeley, CA: The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1995), 2.

well as how a model may illustrate a practice or an underlying belief that is deleterious to the process I am proposing. I will also show several ways in which the models provide additional ideas that may be useful to include in the process.

In the final chapter I set out the scenario of a possible process based upon the six concepts and the additional ideas discerned from the four models studied in chapter five. I attempt to enumerate ways in which a local church might design a spiritual-growth process for new believers using the six concepts and the example. However, I set out possible ideas with some misgivings. Bill Easum makes the point of these misgivings clear when he emphasizes that his book, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*, is “not a ‘how to’ book.” He cautions, “Instead of offering pre-packaged programs or quick fixes, I offer you the context in which to discover your own ministries and long-term solutions.”⁴ It is not my intention to create a program or to offer elements of a program that should be used by every local church. My use of the concepts discerned from the new science is meant to help a local church to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers in the way that fits its history, its environment, and the ministry that the Holy Spirit has given to it.

With this caution in mind, I consider two assumptions of the thesis of this dissertation: spiritual growth is expected of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and the spiritual growth of believers in Jesus Christ is meant to take place in community with other believers, in the church.

⁴ William M. Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, by Anybody* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 15.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO ASSUMPTIONS

Two assumptions underlie the thesis of this dissertation: a new believer is expected to grow spiritually, and the believer's spiritual growth is to occur in the church. I will show that in the teachings of Jesus, the epistles of Paul, and the epistles of Peter, belief in Jesus Christ does not consist of a one-time event but is the beginning of a life of spiritual growth. I will also show that, particularly in the ministry of Jesus and in the theology of the Apostle Paul, the spiritual growth of believers in Jesus Christ is not an individual matter but is meant to take place in fellowship with other believers.

Spiritual Growth

The spiritual growth of the believer in Jesus Christ is to be a process of transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Dallas Willard calls the disciples of Jesus Christ "apprentices": "Disciples of Jesus are those who are with him learning to be like him." Willard asserts that in a congregation in which apprenticeship to Jesus is not a given, members of such a congregation "assume one can be a Christian forever and never become a disciple in any New Testament sense."¹ In this section it will be shown that the 'New Testament sense' of a disciple is one who is growing spiritually, being formed

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 241, 2.

and transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus expected his followers, those who were his disciples while he lived on earth and those who would follow him after his ascension into heaven, to grow. Jesus instructed his disciples to “seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).² ‘Seek’ is the present imperative: try to obtain, desire to possess God’s kingdom.³ To seek involves a goal, a search or quest, an orientation of the will to God.⁴ Seeking implies, therefore, a process, not an event. The desire of believers must be to strive to possess the righteousness of God. Seeking the righteousness of God is not like hunting for an Easter egg—when you find it, you are done. Seeking God’s righteousness is a way of living, a movement of the heart toward God.

It would seem impossible that any human being could possess the righteousness of God. In fact, no one can possess the righteousness of God without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will live in the believer (John 14:17) and will teach the believer “all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). It is the Holy Spirit living in the believer who will make it possible for the believer to desire, to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness and to move continually toward God.

In Matt. 18:1, Jesus’ disciples, who have apparently been arguing among themselves, come and ask Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” In response, Jesus calls a child to stand by him. Jesus tells his disciples that they

² All Scripture references are to the NIV unless otherwise noted.

³ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (1979), s.v. “ζητέω.” This work will be referred to as BAGD in notes following.

⁴ Heinrich Greeven, “ζητέω, ζήτησις, ἐκζητέω, ἐπιζητέω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Stuttgart, Germany: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, n.d.; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 893.

must change and become like little children. It is the Holy Spirit living in the believer who will enable the believer to be 'born again' (John 3:3) and become like a little child. Jesus told his disciples, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Here Jesus uses the verb *στρέφω* in the passive voice: turning or changing inwardly,⁵ and the passive 'become.' The believer does not change his or her nature or become like a little child by force of her will but allows herself to be changed and to become like a little child by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within her. Johannes Behm describes the little child: "To be a child (→ *παιδίον*) is to be little, to need help, to be receptive to it. He who is converted becomes little before God . . . , ready to let God work in him."⁶

A little child is in the process of growing to maturity. The image of the believer as a child is thus an image of growth. As the Apostle Paul noted, the power for the growth of the believer comes from God: "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:7). The new believer, whom Jesus describes as a newborn (John 3:3) does not emerge as a fully mature believer. He begins his spiritual life as an infant (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:1) who must grow, by the grace and power of God, to maturity in Christ.

Jesus teaches, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matt. 11:29). In this verse the word 'learn' is the Greek *μάθετε*. The *μαθητής*, the disciple, is the one Jesus calls to be his own and who steps out of the crowd in response to Jesus' call. The *μαθητής* is the 'learner,' one who is transformed by the Holy Spirit and begins a process of learning from Jesus. Michael Wilkins calls the process of being a disciple a life-commitment.⁷

⁵ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. "*στρέφω*."

⁶ Johannes Behm, "*μετανοέω, μεάνοια*," TDNT, 4:1003.

⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 109.

Jesus teaches in parables that imply, if not state, his understanding that the believer, his *μαθητής*, is to grow.⁸ In the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-23), the one who hears ‘the message about the kingdom’ (the *λόγος*) (one who received the seed that fell on good soil) is the one “who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matt. 13:23). The word translated ‘produces’ is *καρποφορεῖ*, to bear fruit, the ‘fruit of the inner life’ as revealed in the conduct of one’s life.⁹ The bearing of fruit is a process that takes time and is a natural process of growth.

In the parable immediately following (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), the wheat and the weeds are pictured as growing together. When asked if the weeds should be pulled out, the owner said, “Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matt. 13:30). Those who follow Jesus are to live so that they bear fruit and grow to spiritual maturity (even as they live among the weeds). It is important to note here that the wheat is described as growing *among* the weeds. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two. New Testament professor Donald Hagner observes, “The present age is thus one in which human society (and thus even the Church) is a mixture of those of the evil one and those of the kingdom. . . . [At the end of the age] the evil will be shown for what they are, but the righteous too will become conspicuous.”¹⁰ Even the followers of Jesus cannot distinguish wheat from weeds, although some followers seem to think otherwise. Perhaps one cannot even know whether one is a stalk of wheat or a weed. Rather than labeling themselves or one another, followers of Jesus Christ must make a commitment to lifelong spiritual growth.

⁸ I understand the eschatological context of these parables. As both parables refer to individual seeds and plants, there is nothing to preclude application of these parables to individuals as they await the eschaton.

⁹ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “*καρποφορέω*.”

¹⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 395.

Jesus calls his disciples out from the crowd, they follow him, and he teaches them. After his death and resurrection Jesus Christ calls on his disciples to reproduce themselves. In the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18-20, the disciples are sent to “go and make disciples of all nations.” How? By baptizing *and* teaching, in the power of the living Christ (“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” v. 20). The act of baptism does not result in knowledge but in becoming a disciple, learning from more experienced disciples in the presence and power of the living Christ. As Donald Hagner notes, the emphasis here is on “the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship. . . .”¹¹ This ‘arduous task’ is the work of the church.

Our growth as followers of Jesus Christ is a process, a way of life. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon describe this process of growth:

When we are baptized, we (like the first disciples) jump on a moving train. As disciples, we do not so much accept a creed, or come to a clear sense of self-understanding by which we know this or that with utter certitude. We become part of a journey that began long before we got here and shall continue long after we are gone.¹²

Jesus envisioned the life of one called out, a follower of his, as a life of being in intimate fellowship with him: learning, growing, producing fruit, being shaped by him, learning to obey his commands and, with his power, teaching those who come after us.

¹¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 887.

¹² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 52.

The Example of Peter

In the life of Simon Peter, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts, we see that Jesus expects us to grow, not to be fully formed disciples as soon as we respond to his call.

Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, were fisherman and are described in the book of Acts as 'unschooled' and "ordinary" (Acts 4:13). Jesus called Peter and Andrew as they were fishing. They left their nets 'at once' and followed Jesus (Matt. 4:18-20).

In Matt. 14:29, Peter begins to walk on the water of the lake toward Jesus. Here Peter begins to take leadership among the disciples. In the storm story recounted in Matt. 8:23-27, no one of the disciples is named. In Matt. 14:26, the disciples as a group cry out in fear, thinking that Jesus is a ghost. "But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'" In this storm story, Peter speaks up, "'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water'" (vv. 27-28). Jesus calls him and Peter walks on the water toward Jesus. But Peter turns his eyes to the storm instead of to Jesus and begins to sink. Jesus caught Peter, saying to him, "You of little faith" (v. 31). Peter experiences a high moment and a low moment as he grows in his faith. "The whole scene of Peter walking on the sea presents a disciple on the way of discipleship."¹³

In Matt. 15:15, Peter is the disciple who asks to have a parable explained. He takes the risk of looking foolish. (Indeed, in v. 16 an exasperated Jesus responds, asking his disciples, "Are you still so dull?") In Matt. 16:16, Peter confesses that, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus praises Peter. Jesus almost immediately reprimands Peter when Peter denies that Jesus must be killed and raised

¹³ Heinz Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth and Heinz Joachim Held, trans. Percy Scott, The New Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1963), 206.

to life (16:21-23). In Matt. 26, Peter denies three times that he knows Jesus (vv. 69-75), even ‘calling down curses on himself’ (v. 74).

Yet this same Peter takes leadership of the 120 disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:15) and delivers a speech on the day of Pentecost that leads to the baptism of three thousand people (Acts 2:14-41). However, even as a leader of the church Peter’s faith still falters on occasion. In Acts 10:9-16, Peter argues with the Lord about eating unclean animals. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul describes how he took Peter to task for leading the Jews in Antioch to withdraw from having table fellowship with Gentiles, leading the Gentiles to believe that they were second class Christians.¹⁴

In the life of Peter we see our own imperfect lives as followers of Jesus Christ. If a decision to follow Jesus meant automatic spiritual transformation, Peter would never have sunk in the water or denied that he knew Jesus. Peter would have been perfect from the moment he left his nets to follow Jesus. Instead, as Peter lived with Jesus, Peter grew in his faith. Michael J. Wilkins points out that Peter’s life is one of highs and lows:

Peter is both a positive and negative example of a disciple. He is a very human disciple whom Matthew has presented as a model for all disciples to follow. He is an example of exercising faith (14:28), confessing Jesus as Messiah, Son of God (16:16) and learning from Jesus (17:24-27). In even more cases he is the example of what not to do: disciples should not take their eyes off Jesus (14:30), should not be a stumbling-block (16:23), should not seek earthly rewards (19:27), and should not deny Jesus (26:69-70). Even with all the highs and lows of Peter’s prominence, he is characterized by Matthew as a very real, very human, quite exemplary, disciple.¹⁵

¹⁴ Richard Longenecker, in reviewing the controversy over this passage, concludes “The picture thus presented in v 12b is that of a misguided tactical maneuver made under pressure—the action of one [Peter] whose convictions were proper, but who became confused under pressure, could not bring himself to express his true convictions, and so found himself retreating from what he knew to be right.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 75.

¹⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World*, 211.

The imperfections of Peter give us hope. Our failures do not condemn us. Like Peter we too are to allow Jesus Christ to transform and shape us. We will have our high times and our low times. Spiritual growth, placing ourselves into the hands of Jesus Christ to be formed and transformed, will take a lifetime of successes *and* failures.

The Teaching of Paul

How did the Apostle Paul interpret the journey of spiritual transformation in his epistles?

The very fact that Paul wrote letters to the churches indicates that our lives as believers are a part of a process. If a person became perfectly one with Jesus Christ when he or she became a believer in Jesus, there would be no factions, quarrelling, pride or other problems that plagued (and continue to plague) the local churches.

Paul's letters are his teaching to the churches. Teaching was a part of his ministry. In Acts 20:20, Paul reminds the Ephesian church, "[I] have taught you publicly and from house to house." Paul taught the churches because the believers needed to grow.

In 1 Cor. 3:1, Paul chides the Corinthian church: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ."¹⁶ The Corinthian believers are not ready for Paul to speak to them as spiritually transformed persons. They are immature in Christ and need to grow.¹⁷

As Paul continues in 1 Cor. 3, he describes his understanding of spiritual transformation. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16); "You are of Christ" (1 Cor. 3:23). As

¹⁶ Peter, in his first epistle, calls the believers who are still under the control of worldly passions "newborn babies." 1 Pet. 2:2.

¹⁷ C. K. Barrett writes: "Mature the Corinthians certainly are not, but they may be described as **babes in Christ**; that is, they are not heathen, but Christian; but they have only just made a beginning in the Christian life." C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 80.

we grow spiritually, we become more and more ‘of Christ’ as the Holy Spirit lives and works within us.

Paul uses two words to describe spiritual growth as a process that leads to the believers’ maturity in Jesus Christ: *αὐξάνω* and cognates of the word *μορφώω*.

Αὐξάνω is translated ‘grow’ or ‘increase.’¹⁸ In the New Testament, the verb refers to the natural growth of plants (as it does in many of the parables of Jesus) and to the natural growth of a person.¹⁹

In 2 Cor. 10:15, Paul speaks of the growth of faith. His hope is that the faith of the believers in Corinth will continue to grow. Paul speaks again of growth in faith and of love for one another in 2 Thess. 1:3: “Your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”²⁰

In Eph. 4:14, Paul again speaks of believers as infants. In this chapter he speaks of each believer using his or her gifts to build up the church until we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (4:13-14). Believers begin their spiritual journey as infants and will, together with the other believers who comprise the church, “in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (4:15).

In Col. 1:10, Paul prays that the Colossian believers will please God by “growing in the knowledge of God.” Professor Peter T. O’Brien observes that some commentators join the active participles *αὐξανόμενοι* and *καρποφοροῦντες*, used in this verse. When the participles are so joined, they are “. . . related to the source of progress in maturity.”²¹ Again, Paul stresses that the life of the believer is a life

¹⁸ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “*αὐξάνω*.”

¹⁹ Gerhard Delling, “*ὑπεραυξάνω, αὐξάνω*,” TDNT 8: 518.

²⁰ Here, Paul uses *ὑπεραυξάνω*, to “grow wonderfully or abundantly.” BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “*ὑπεραυξάνω*.”

²¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 23.

in the process of growth.

It is true that in the passages cited above Paul's use of the word 'grow' is directed to the church as a whole (or at least to individual congregations), not to the growth of individual believers. Earnest Best makes this point and observes that as each individual uses his or her spiritual gifts for the church, the whole church grows. Best asserts that "individual members are not regarded as growing. . . ." ²² Yet how can the church as a body grow unless each part is growing in faith, in love, in the knowledge of God, and in both the understanding of and use of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body? "To *each one* of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph. 4:7, emphasis added). As Donald Hohensee and Allen Odell describe spiritual gifts, they "are usually discovered as one matures in Christian discipleship. It will take time to identify and begin to use the spiritual gifts God has given. . . . [God] is at work bringing you into conformity with His own holy character." ²³ The individual believer must grow spiritually, letting his spiritual gifts mature, if he is to contribute to the growth of the church.

Paul also uses cognates of the word *μορφώω*, "to form, shape." ²⁴

In Gal. 4:19, Paul expresses his concern over the Galatians returning to their pre-Christian ways: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of child birth until Christ is formed [*μορφωθῇ*] in you. . . ." Paul uses the passive voice here to indicate that it is the work of God to form Christ in us. Johannes Behm notes that the *process* of spiritual growth is emphasized in this verse:

Becoming a Christian is here depicted in terms of birth, . . . and the goal is the fashioning of Christ in man. . . . The nerve of this metaphor, which is based on the development of the child in the mother's womb . . . , is that Christ should come to full growth, to maturity, in the Christian. . . .

²² Ernest Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London, Eng: S.P.C.K., 1955), 150.

²³ Donald Hohensee and Allen Odell, *Your Spiritual Gifts* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, Scripture Press, 1992), 117.

²⁴ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. "*μορφώω*."

This is a process which is never completed in this aeon. . . .²⁵

In Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul uses the word *μεταμορφώω*. The addition of the preposition ‘*μετά*’ to the root *μορφεύω* creates the meaning “change to another form, transform.”²⁶

Paul teaches in Romans 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” ‘Transformed’ is the passive, *μεταμορφούσθε*. Do not be conformed to what the world wants you to be but “let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”²⁷ In 2 Cor. 3:18, Paul emphasizes that it is God who brings about our transformation: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Johannes Behm stresses, “Above all, what Paul means by transformation is not an autonomous, immanent, mystical event. It is a process. . . .”²⁸ There is no magic moment in which we become mature, spiritual people and can bypass the work of spiritual growth.

In Rom. 8:29, Paul uses another form of *μορφώω*, *σύμμορφος* — “having the same form, similar in form.”²⁹ “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. . . .” Paul is again speaking of a process of transformation, not an instantaneous transformation.³⁰ Those who follow Jesus Christ are in the process of becoming new, becoming like Christ as they give themselves to the Holy Spirit to be transformed.

²⁵ Johannes Behm, “*μορφή, μορφώω, μόρφωσις, μεταμορφώω*,” TDNT, 4:753, 4.

²⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, new ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: by the author, 1969), 83.

²⁷ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “*μεταμορφώω*.”

²⁸ Johannes Behm, “*μορφή*,” TDNT, 4: 759.

²⁹ BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “*σύμμορφος*.”

³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, vol. 38A, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 483.

Paul also speaks of the ‘fruit’ grown in the life of the believer. In Gal. 5:22, the Holy Spirit produces the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in those who ‘belong to Christ Jesus.’ In Eph. 5:9, goodness, righteousness and truth shown in the life of the believer are the ‘fruit of the light.’ In Phil. 1:11, Paul prays for the believers to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” As noted above, fruit does not appear fully formed on the branch or the vine but must grow, from blossom to maturity. Water, sunlight, proper soil, fertilizer, and cultivation must be applied for the fruit to be as full and rich as possible. In the same way, the spiritual fruit that grows in the believer must be tended and nurtured.

The Epistles of Peter

We also find references to the growth of the believer in the Epistles of Peter.

As we have noted, 1 Peter 2:2 speaks of the growth of faith: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. . . .” The word translated ‘grow up,’ is *αὐξάνω*, referred to above. Here the verb is in the passive voice, *αὐξήθητε*. The believer grows by drinking ‘spiritual milk.’ Gerhard Delling notes, “As the baby grows physically through milk, so the Christian steadily grows spiritually through the Word.”³¹

In 2 Peter 1:5, believers are to ‘make every effort’ to possess the virtues listed in vv. 6 and 7 (faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love) in ‘increasing measure.’³² In 2 Peter 3:18, believers are exhorted to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Again, the word used is *αὐξάνετε*, here a present imperative. Richard

³¹ Gerhard Delling, “*ὑπεραυξάνω, αὐξάνω*,” TDNT 8:518.

³² 2 Peter 2:8 reads in full, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is interesting to note that the word translated ‘unproductive’ is *ἀκάπρους*, ‘unfruitful.’ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 188. Growth in the listed virtues keeps us fruit bearing.

Bauckham points out that this growth is to be a lifetime process: ‘Here *γνώσις* [knowledge] is that deepening experience of Christ and understanding of the truth of Christ which should continue to increase until the Parousia brings a full revelation of him.’³³

Summary

Jesus knew that when an individual came out of the crowd and followed him the new follower would have to grow. As Jesus told Nicodemus, a person must be ‘born again (John 3:3),’ becoming a baby who grows into the maturity of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. When one begins to follow Jesus, one does not begin as a fully formed adult as an infant. Just as infants grow to maturity, followers of Jesus must grow to maturity in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ calls those who believe in him to grow spiritually. Paul and Peter understood the believer’s life in Christ as a life of growth: growth in faith, growth in the knowledge of God, and growth of the fruit produced as the Holy Spirit works in the believer’s life. Our lives as followers of Jesus Christ are to be lives of growth as we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The Church

Belief in Jesus Christ does not rest on a one-time event. One who comes to belief in Jesus Christ has only begun the journey of spiritual transformation from spiritual infant to mature believer. The journey of spiritual growth is not just for a select few but is a journey that every believer is expected to take. How does a new believer grow to become a mature believer? In this section we will see that the

³³ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 338.

believer's growth into the likeness of Jesus Christ is meant to occur in community with other believers. It is in, with, and with the help of the community of believers that the Apostle Paul calls the Body of Christ and we call the church that the believer embarks upon the journey of faith.

The Community of Disciples in the Ministry of Jesus

Scholars seem to agree that Jesus' mission was not to found a church or to win individuals to the kingdom of God, but to restore Israel, the Jews, to the purpose that God had originally intended for them—that they would be his people.³⁴ For example, Jesus chose 'The Twelve' to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, the Jewish people.³⁵ James Dunn points out that Jesus referred to his death as "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20), anticipating his death "as a covenant sacrifice."³⁶

Jesus was 'gathering' or 'regathering' a group—the people of Israel. Jesus, in his gathering of Israel, reached beyond those who considered themselves the 'pure' Jewish community. He went to Samaria and preached there (John 4). He went to the Gentiles and ministered to them (Mark 5:1-12). Jesus healed the servant of a Roman soldier (Luke 7:1-10). He included among his disciples women (Luke 8:2,3) and Levi, a tax collector. He frequently had table fellowship with 'tax collectors and sinners.' Jesus was calling together a group, not just of Jews, but of people from all parts of society.

³⁴ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 7-29; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus' Call to Discipleship, Understanding Jesus Today*, ed. Howard Clark Kee (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge University Press, 1992; reprint, New York, NY: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 94-105; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no.16 (Maryknoll, MD: Orbis Books, 1991), 25-28.

³⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus' Call to Discipleship*, 96.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

Many of those who followed Jesus as his disciples traveled with him as a group. Jesus taught them by word and by example. Disciples of Jesus learned together. It is true that some who believed in Jesus (like Mary, Martha and Lazarus) did not follow him from place to place. Nevertheless, when Jesus was with them he taught them together, not individually (e.g. John 12:1).

Jesus taught groups, not individuals. It is true that at times Jesus seemed to teach some people individually, notably Nicodemus in John 3 and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Stephen Barton observes that each individual actually represents a group. "Nicodemus is a Pharisee and 'a leader of the Jews' (3:1), the woman at the well is a representative Samaritan (cf. 4:9), Pilate represents Roman authority, and so on. So these individuals are not to be taken individualistically!"³⁷

In Jesus' teaching, he indicated that the disciples would remain a group. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:14). 'You' is the plural, *ὑμεῖς*. The disciples are not just individuals. They are a group, a city.³⁸

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon assert that the Sermon on the Mount, "by its announcement and its demands, makes necessary the formation of a colony. . . ."³⁹ As believers in Jesus Christ try to live out the truth of Jesus Christ and to be faithful to him, they form community by "listening to and enacting that story in the church."⁴⁰ Some of the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount appear

³⁷ Stephen C. Barton, "Christian Community in the Light of the Gospel of John," in *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 99 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 294.

³⁸ Ken M. Campbell notes that, for the hearers of Jesus, a city was people, not buildings: "It is not the walls of the city that are to be admired, but the nature and character of her inhabitants, the people of God, as determined by the divine presence in her midst." K.M. Campbell, "The New Jerusalem in Matthew 5.14," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (1978): 362.

³⁹ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

to be teachings for an individual to follow [e.g., “First go and be reconciled to your brother” (Matt. 5:24); “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28)]. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is addressed to the disciples (Matt. 5:1, 2). The teachings are addressed to ‘you’ (the plural) and teachings for individuals refer to ‘anyone.’ The accountability and example believers give to one another is crucial to learning how to follow Jesus as his disciples.

In Jesus’ last discourse in the Gospel of John, Jesus seems to anticipate the church. He prays for those who believe in him: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that *they may be one* as we are one” (John 17:11, emphasis added). Jesus goes on to clarify that his prayer is not only for the Twelve or for those in the upper room with him: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20, 21, 23).

At the Last Supper, Jesus recognizes that his disciples are not just a group of individuals but a unity. In his words, Jesus anticipates the forming of a community: “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Jesus was not just referring to those disciples who were gathered with him at the table at that moment in history, but to those who would gather after his death. His body had not yet been ‘given’ and there was nothing, as yet, to remember. The verb translated ‘do’ is *ποιεῖτε*, a plural imperative. Jesus here anticipates a gathered community that would reenact his giving of the bread and the cup in light of his death and resurrection. Although scholars do not agree whether during his life Jesus meant to found

a church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes that, in his view, the Last Supper is the time that “the Lord of the church gives his disciples communion with him, and thus with one another. . . . Jesus has now openly expressed his will to found the church.”⁴¹

The disciples saw themselves as a group. After deserting Jesus at the time of his arrest, they made their way back together. Jesus appears to the disciples when they “were together” (John 20:19) and were “assembled together” (Luke 24:33).

In Matt. 28:18-20, Jesus sends his disciples out as a group. The verbs that he uses as he sends them out are in the plural: *πορευθέντες* (go), *μαθητεύσατε* (“make disciples/teach”⁴²), *βαπτίζοντες* (baptizing) and *διδάσκοντες* (teaching). Jesus promised to be with ‘you,’ again the plural, *ὑμῶν*, “always, to the very end of the age.” Jesus’ command and his promise is not just to those gathered around him at that moment in time (to whom he might have said, “to the end of your lives”) but to all who would follow them as disciples ‘to the very end of the age.’

The disciples understood that Jesus sent them as a group. At the end of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:52), “the eleven disciples went to Galilee” as Jesus had instructed them (Matt. 28:10, 16). In Acts, when Jesus Christ tells them to go to Jerusalem and wait (Acts 1:4), they went to Jerusalem together (Acts 1:12). When they reached Jerusalem, all one hundred and twenty of the disciples packed into “the room where they were staying” (Acts 1:13). “They all joined together constantly in prayer. . . .” (1:14a).

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples became more than just a group gathered around Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit connected them in “fellowship with the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1). Jesus had told them that after he died the Father would send the Holy Spirit to them: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the

⁴¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church*, trans. R. Gregor Smith (New York, NY: Harper & Row; London, Eng: William Collins Sons, 1963), 109, 10.

⁴² BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “μαθητεύω.”

world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:18, 19). Jesus clarified the role of the Holy Spirit: “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:14).

After Pentecost, the disciples continued to be a group gathered around Jesus who were connected by the Holy Spirit. They were no longer gathered around the human man, Jesus, but around the risen, living Christ. The disciples were imbued with the power of Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within and among them.

The Myth of the Lone Christian

It is not uncommon to hear a person say, “I’m a Christian. I don’t need the church to be a Christian. I can do it myself.” Can a person be a Christian without the church?

New Testament scholar Jerome Murphy-O’Connor emphatically states no. He describes the clash between the modern concept of the individual and the community that is the church. Both concepts cannot coexist. He observes that in today’s society, an ‘authentic individual’ is one who has an ‘independent and separate existence.’ However, for the Apostle Paul, “separatedness is precisely what characterizes inauthenticity.” Murphy-O’Connor asserts that:

The true subject of authentic existence is the community to which the members belong. . . . [From the perspective of secular society] the local church appears as a collection of individuals which has a great deal in common with the local dramatic society. . . . The Christian community preexists the members who belong to it, and it is the community which makes them what they are by empowering them to move from ‘death’ to ‘life’. Thus, whereas individuals bring a dramatic society into being, the Christian community brings its members into being, the new being of authenticity.⁴³

⁴³ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of St. Paul*, vol. 2, *Good News Studies* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 180, 1.

One cannot be a Christian 'by myself.' A Christian is a part of the Christian community, the church. As professor Michael Jenkins observes, "Solitary religion tends toward idolatry, the worship of false gods made in our own image."⁴⁴ Ideas about God that the self creates become the ideal, replacing God. It is only in our relationship to other Christians that one's idolatry of self can be seen for what it is. Believers are mirrors for each other. Pastor Thorwald Lorenzen agrees: "The community of faith knows a secret; the secret that the 'self' needs the 'other' to become what it is."⁴⁵

No follower of Jesus Christ, no person seeking to do the will of God, can exist independently of other followers. It is as if one's arm were to decide to leave the rest of the body and live on its own because it 'did not need the rest of the body.' When the arm leaves the body, it begins the inevitable process of decay and death. Even though a believer may at times experience physical isolation from other believers (perhaps by illness or imprisonment), he or she is still a part of the church.⁴⁶ Robert Patterson comments that it is because we are a part of the church that we can grow spiritually. He avers that those disconnected from the church "are spiritual orphans. They are cut off from a vital source of spiritual nourishment and growth."⁴⁷

Jesus speaks of our need for each other in his description of himself as the 'true vine' in John 15:1. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. . . ; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The church, the union of the followers of Jesus Christ, is 'in Christ.' Theologian Eduard Schweizer comments on this verse, declaring that, "As the branches are fruit-bearing branches only because they are 'in'

⁴⁴ Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 222.

⁴⁵ Thorwald Lorenzen, "The Church as Koinonia," *St. Mark's Review* 172 (1998): 11.

⁴⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that those separated from the community of believers understand that "the companionship of a fellow Christian . . . is an unspeakable gift of God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1954), 20.

⁴⁷ Robert W. Patterson, "In Search of the Visible Church," *Christianity Today* 35, no. 3 (1991): 36.

the vine, engrafted into its stem, the church lives in its Lord, ‘in Christ.’”⁴⁸ As branches of the vine, believers must remain connected to the vine; it is from the vine, from Jesus Christ, that the branches receive life. The branches and the vine, *together*, make up the whole plant.

Mutuality and Unity in the Body of Christ

The Apostle Paul indicates his understanding of the church as a whole in his use of the reciprocal pronoun *ἀλλήλων*, ‘one another,’ which he uses forty-one times (with various endings). When Paul uses the word *ἀλλήλων*, he is usually exhorting the community of believers:

Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16)
 Instruct one another (Rom. 15:14)
 Have equal concern for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)
 Agree with one another (2 Cor. 13:11)
 Serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
 Bearing with one another (Eph. 4:2; Col 3:13)
 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another (Eph. 4:32)
 Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)
 Teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16)
 Be kind to one another (1 Thess. 5:15)
 Love one another (Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12, 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:3)

“For Paul the ‘one another’ ministry was the basic fabric of local church life,” writes John Zens.⁴⁹ Believers are bound to one another in Christ. They do not exist in isolation. Those in the church are to look out, not for their own interests, but for one another’s interests.

In his metaphor of the church as the Body of Christ, Paul describes his vision of the church as a whole with each believer and each church playing a necessary part: “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the

⁴⁸ Eduard Schweizer, *The Church as the Body of Christ* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, Chime Paperbacks, 1964), 48.

⁴⁹ Jon Zens, “Food for Thought On: Building up the Body—One Man or One Another?” *Baptist Reformation Review* 10, no. 2 (1981): 16.

others” (Rom. 12:5).⁵⁰ Burton Scott Easton describes Paul’s concept of the church as “an organism filled with life from a single source.”⁵¹ The image of the church as the Body of Christ is thus a living, dynamic image. In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, Paul expands this metaphor of the church as a body. The body is made up of many parts (v. 14) that are equally important. Each part needs all the other parts. “Its parts should have equal concern for each other” (v. 25) so that “if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (v. 26). Each believer is an important and necessary part of the church (v. 27). Avery Dulles emphasizes the mutuality of those in the body of Christ as described in 1 Cor. 12 as, “mutual union, mutual concern, and mutual dependence of the members of the local community upon one another.”⁵² Believers need each other.

Paul’s discussion of the church as a body in 1 Corinthians is in the context of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts at the Spirit’s discretion, for the ‘common good,’ for the benefit of the whole body (1 Cor. 12: 4-11). The metaphor of the church as a body appears again in Eph. 4:16. Christ is described as the head of the body (Eph. 1:10, 4:15). In Eph. 4:16, believers are to be ‘fitted together,’ a verb in the passive tense. Believers are to allow Jesus Christ to fit them and hold them together. They are ‘held together’ by each ‘supporting ligament’—each place where believer is connected with other believers.⁵³ In Eph. 2:22, the church is

⁵⁰ On the local congregation as the Body of Christ and the whole church as the Body of Christ in the thought of Paul see Hans Küng, *The Church* (n.p.: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1967; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Image Books, 1976), 295-304.

⁵¹ Burton Scott Easton, “The Church in the New Testament,” *Anglican Theological Review* 22, 3 (1940): 166.

⁵² Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. ed. (New York, NY: Image Books, Doubleday, Random House, 2002), 43.

⁵³ Although *ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτῶν* in Eph. 4:16 is usually translated “ligament,” BAGD points out that the literal meaning is “connection.” BAGD, 2nd. ed., s.v. “*ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτῶν*.”

described as ‘built together,’ *συνοικοδομεῖσθε*. In his commentary on Ephesians, Andrew Lincoln observes that the use of the prefix *συν* denotes that the process of believers being formed into the church is not an individual experience but has to take place with other believers.⁵⁴

Believers need each other. As the members of the body allow Jesus Christ to fit and hold them together, and as they use the gifts they have been given by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the body, they grow and build the body up in love. The spiritual growth of believers, that Jesus Christ anticipated, takes place in the church, in the interaction of believers as they build up one another.

The unity of the functioning of the Body of Christ has its parallel in the functioning of the physical human body. In *The Incredible Machine*, published by the National Geographic Society, the electrical system of the heart is described as follows. This description has a powerful implication for the working of the Body of Christ and its individual parts:

When scattered sparsely across a microscope slide, individual cardiac cells beat at different rates, but as they multiply and join, they form a single heaving sheet. Thus do heart cells behave in the human chest: They do not pulsate discordantly, each sparking to its own beat; they explode in rhythmic harmony. . . . In perfect rhythm each [electrical cell within the cardiac tissue] successively explodes. This trail of electricity flashes so rapidly across the heart that all its cells appear to beat as one.⁵⁵

In exactly the same way, there should be an observable, organic oneness as followers of Jesus Christ function together as the Body of Christ.

In this chapter I have shown that the initial choice of an individual to believe in Jesus Christ is not a once-and-for-all event, but is the beginning of a lifetime of allowing oneself to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Moreover, I

⁵⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce Metzger, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 158.

⁵⁵ Susan Schiefelbein, “The Powerful River,” in *The Incredible Machine*, ed. Robert M. Poole (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1986), 124.

have shown that the believer's spiritual growth is to occur in community with other believers. That the believer is to grow and to grow in community with other believers supports the assumptions of the thesis. It is therefore the responsibility of the local church to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers. In the following chapter, I will explore the new science of quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and complexity theory and propose six concepts from the new science that a local church can use in designing a spiritual-growth process for new believers.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIX CONCEPTS FROM THE NEW SCIENCE

In this chapter we will identify six concepts from the new science of quantum theory, chaos theory and complexity theory that a local church can use in designing a spiritual-growth process. We will consider why we can use concepts from the new science to inform the praxis of the local church. In our discussion of each concept, we will show how the church follows the Newtonian paradigm (the ‘old science’) and the effects of the Newtonian paradigm on the rigidity of the church’s approach to new believers. We will describe how the use of each concept from the new science will enable a spiritual-growth process to be adaptable.

The six concepts we identify in this chapter are the following:

1. An individual’s life and spiritual growth are nonlinear.
2. The process will require creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program.
3. Relationships must be a priority.
4. The local church must take into account the environment in which it exists and the new believer lives.
5. Integrate new believers into the church immediately rather than isolating them from the rest of the congregation.
6. The local church must become a flexible structure that places a priority upon the spiritual growth of its members.

Before we begin to discuss these concepts, we will consider the question, “Can concepts from the new science be applied to the local church?”

Historically, theology and science have had an uneasy and sometimes adversarial relationship, or at least the perception of an adversarial relationship. However, a discussion about the nature of the relationship between science and theology has been occurring for several years. Theologian-scientists such as Nancey Murphy (in writings such as *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*¹) and scientist-theologians such as John Polkinghorne (in writings such as *Belief in God in an Age of Science*²) have, from their perspectives, sought to find ways that science and theology can inform each other.³ John Polkinghorne notes that although science and theology must be true to their own disciplines, there can be some degree of ‘consonance’ between the two.⁴ He says that the task of the scientist-theologian is “the construction of a comprehensive and unified view of reality, within which both theology and science are contained and are able to interact with each other.” In Polkinghorne’s view, science and theology are not opponents but “indispensable partners . . . in the even-handed evaluation of all levels of the exploration of reality and in the search for a unified account of resulting human knowledge.”⁵

Robert Russell agrees with the idea that science and theology are not opponents. Like Polkinghorne, Russell points out that rather than being in opposition, science and religion can have a mutually beneficial interaction. Russell maintains that “theories in physics can function heuristically in the theological

¹ Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. Willaim P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990; Reprint, Cornell Paperbacks, 1993).

² John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, Terry Lecture series (New Haven, CT and London, Eng.: Yale University Press, 1998.)

³ The designation ‘scientist-theologian’ is used by John Polkinghorne in *Scientists as Theologians: A Comparison of the Writings of Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke and John Polkinghorne* (London, Eng.: SPCK, 1996), 1. I have taken the liberty of using the reverse designation, ‘theologian-scientist.’

⁴ How much ‘consonance’ between science and theology can and should be achieved seems to be the question. John Polkinghorne, *Scientists as Theologians*, 81-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 12.

context of discovery by providing conceptual, experiential, moral, or aesthetic inspiration.”⁶ It is in this context of inspiration for changing the paradigm for the facilitation of the spiritual growth of new believers within the local church that we draw upon concepts from the new science—quantum physics, chaos theory, and complexity theory.⁷

If science can inform theology, then the ‘informing’ must reach to the local church. As both John Polkinghorne and theologian Ray Anderson contend, one cannot separate theology and praxis.⁸ Ray Anderson observes, “Theology is not simply something to be known; theology is something lived and experienced by a particular community.”⁹ My thesis not only seeks to show a point of reconciliation between science and theology, but to make such reconciliation practical in the life of the local church.

Hans Küng compares paradigm changes in science (using Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*¹⁰) with paradigm changes in theology. Küng notes that he is ‘involved in no slight risk’ in considering in the same paper Kuhn’s observations, which have been ignored by theologians, and developments in theology that Kuhn has ignored. Küng concludes, “The *hermeneutical discussion* alone, . . . should be evidence of the fact that we are in the midst of a theological upheaval on

⁶ Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly, “Science and Theology: Mutual Interaction,” in *Bridging Science and Religion*, Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett, ed. Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 33.

⁷ While the new paradigm that I am proposing is presented in the final chapter of this dissertation, I will say here that Reggie McNeal fairly describes the ‘old paradigm’ for spiritual growth as teaching by the well informed to the lesser informed and driven by a prescribed curriculum. The ‘new paradigm’ is based upon learning and is ‘driven by life issues.’ *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, The Jossey-Bass Leadership Network series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 84, 5.

⁸ John Polkinghorne, *Science & Theology: An Introduction* (London, Eng.: SPCK, 1998; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998): 129; Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁹ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 23.

¹⁰ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (London, Eng. and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

which further reflection is sadly needed.”¹¹ This dissertation is an attempt, as Kūng attempts, to make a connection between the observations of science and observations in the realm of the church. As Kūng observes, scientists rely on facts that are always subjective (because the facts are based upon observation and interpretation). Scientists must sometimes reconsider these facts. Kūng contends that “there is no reason therefore to make a method, a project, a model or paradigm absolute: but there is certainly reason for continually starting on a new quest. . . .”¹² In the same way, this dissertation, in joining science and the praxis of the local church, seeks a fresh approach to facilitating the spiritual growth of new believers.

On a very practical level, it would seem incongruous for the church to decry or to ignore the use of concepts from the new science in the praxis of the local church. The church has benefited from and uses the new science every day, albeit unknowingly. For example, local churches use inventions created from the discoveries of quantum physics when they use their computers, telephones, music systems, and even microwave ovens.¹³ If local churches are already benefiting from the new science, why shouldn't their 'people systems' benefit from the new science, too? The new science aids local churches in the mechanics of their worship services. The new science aids local churches in communicating with their members. The new science can aid local churches in 'making disciples' as their people learn, share, and live out the story of the Gospel together.

The process that a local church could design to facilitate the spiritual growth of new and returning believers will include the following elements.

¹¹ Hans Kūng, “Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Kūng and David Tracy, trans. Margaret Köhl (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ For a comprehensive review of inventions that have become possible through quantum mechanics (including lasers and transistors) see, Ian Bindloss, “Contributions of Physics to the Information Age,” 2003, <www.physics.ucla.edu/~ianb/history/> (21 June, 2004).

1. An individual's life and spiritual growth are nonlinear.

'New science' is called 'new' in contrast to classical science. Danah Zohar compares the new science and classical science: "In the old science, the Newtonian paradigm, nature is seen as simple, law-abiding, and ultimately controllable."¹⁴ In 'classical science,' the science of Newton, the world was a machine. T. Irene Sanders, executive director of the Washington Center for Complexity and Public Policy, describes this metaphor. As she explains, in the Newtonian paradigm, "The world operates like a machine, with clockwork precision through a code of rules and consequences. It created a world of sameness—predictable, controlled, known. . . ."¹⁵ Life—both of individuals and organizations—was a linear progression of events.

Zohar points out that "both quantum and chaotic systems are nonlinear."¹⁶ In a linear process, $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ and so on. Thomas Petzinger, reporter and editor for the *Wall Street Journal*, writes that, in contrast, nonlinear systems "do not always behave in smooth, continuous, or perfectly predictable ways."¹⁷ In quantum theory, a system may act in a linear manner. However, as Ian Marshall and Danah Zohar note in describing quantum physics, "Quantum events often happen 'just as they happen,' and there is no way to know what will happen next, or why, or how."¹⁸

Our lives resemble quantum events. As much as we try to maintain control, our lives most likely do not proceed in a linear, predictable progression. However, the nonlinearity of our lives is not undesirable. Contrary to what our 'common sense' tells us, nonlinearity can lead to stability. James Gleick makes the observation that the nonlinearity of a system can lead to feedback that actually causes a system

¹⁴ Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, 43.

¹⁵ T. Irene Sanders, *Strategic Thinking and the New Science: Planning in the Midst of Chaos, Complexity and Change* (New York, NY: The Free Press, Simon & Schuster, 1998), 50.

¹⁶ Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, 58.

¹⁷ Thomas Petzinger, Jr., *The New Pioneers: The Men and Women Who Are Transforming the Workplace and Marketplace* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 39.

¹⁸ Ian Marshall and Danah Zohar, *Who's Afraid of Schrödinger's Cat? All the Science Ideas You Need to Keep Up with the New Thinking* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1997), 297.

to become stable. Gleick observes, "Nonlinear feedback regulates motion, making it more robust. In a linear system, a perturbation has a constant effect. In the presence of nonlinearity, a perturbation can feed on itself until it dies away and the system returns automatically to a stable state."¹⁹ Although the nonlinearity of our lives makes our future seem uncertain, nonlinearity can be a desirable factor, actually helping to create stability in our lives and in our organizations.

Rather than attempting to create a process for the spiritual growth of new believers in the local church that follows a linear pattern of life events, the church must take into account the nonlinearity of real life. It is a fallacy to put every person in the linear life process of birth, childhood, teenage years, college, marriage, children, empty nest, grandchildren, retirement, old age, and death. For example, Sunday-School classes are usually based on the presumed stage of a person's life. 'High School' classes are for young people in grades 7-12, ages 15-18. 'College/Career' classes are for young adults who have graduated from high school. Young families, those families with parents in their 20s, may have a class even though couples of middle age may have young children. 'Singles' groups are often for young adults rather than singles of middle age or seniors.

In the of today's world, an 18-year-old high school athlete may go straight into the NFL or NBA rather than to college or even turn professional before graduating from high school. An 80-year-old grandmother may be a college freshman. Many couples never have children. Many mothers and some fathers are single parents. Women may have children after age 50.²⁰ A person may lose his spouse at age 20 or celebrate his 70th wedding anniversary. A process for spiritual growth

¹⁹ James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1987; New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 193, 4.

²⁰ For example, see Beth Johnson, "Joan Lunden: A Home Going," *Good Housekeeping*, September 2003, 160-5.

in the local church must be able to adjust for the nonlinear progression of an individual's real life instead of being locked into a rigid progression of life steps. George Barna concurs, saying that surveys find that the learning experiences that most churches provide "push everyone through the same generic journey. . . ." ²¹

In its Christian Education programs, the church has treated people as if they lived linear, predictable lives. The use of 'Graded Lessons' and Uniform Lessons (in which the whole class studies the same lesson) is evidence of this view. Professor of Christian Education, Nevin C. Harner describes the 'Graded Church' concept. Students are divided into age groups—children, young people, and adults. ²² No consideration is given to the reality of the lives of the individuals in the groups. What of young people who are already parents, who are working, or who have dropped out of school? It would appear that in the Graded Church a 'young person is 'young person' by virtue of being in age between a child and an adult, regardless of his or her life circumstances.

Kennon L. Callahan stresses that, while life seems to be a series of predictable stages, people are not developmental stages. Each person is a distinct individual. He emphasizes that "life is a matter of crises as well as stages." ²³ Such factors as death, disease, disability, or the unexpected loss of a job cause our lives to take unexpected turns. Our spiritual growth is not linear, either. As Gerald May observes,

²¹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, Barna Reports for Highly Effective Churches (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, Random House, 2001), 91.

²² Nevin C. Harner, *The Educational Work of the Church*, The Abingdon Religious Education Texts, ed. John W. Langdale, Guides to Christian Leadership, ed. Paul H. Vieth (New York, NY and Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1939), 68-72.

²³ Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, 1990), 53.

“The process of this soul journey cannot be rigidly categorized into stepwise stages.”²⁴ Sometimes we grow rapidly, as we see in new believers or at times of crisis; sometimes we grow slowly, and sometimes it seems as if nothing is happening at all.

No two people will experience identical life circumstances. Perhaps a discipleship process can equip new believers to respond to the possibilities of life, rather than merely reacting to what has already happened. In the last chapter, we will discuss ideas for designing a process for spiritual growth that will help individuals to cope with life events.

2. The process will require creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program.

The order of discrete parts characterized the Newtonian world. Church consultants Bill Easum and Tom Bandy describe ‘church as machine.’ They call such a church the ‘institutional church’: a machine with a ‘control center’ and the people as the parts of the machine. Their illustration is a drawing of an engine.²⁵ In discussing his vision of permission-giving churches (the opposite of the ‘institutional church’), Bill Easum says, “Churches get into trouble when they love rules of order more than they love God.”²⁶ Jesus consistently showed that God is more concerned with people and their relationships with God and with each other than with the ‘orderly and organized’ functioning of the religious machine.²⁷

Most discipleship programs are models of control—finish these workbooks in this order, watch these videos, and ask these questions after the participants

²⁴ Gerald G. May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, 2004), 130.

²⁵ William M. Easum and Thomas G. Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 113.

²⁶ Easum, Bill, “Permission Giving Interview with Bill Easum for Vital Ministry Magazine,” interview by Kristi Rector. <<http://www.easumbandy.com/ermission/interview.htm>> (14 October 2002).

²⁷ E.g., Matt. 23: 4, 13, 23; Luke 13:10-16.

have seen the videos—one-size-fits-all programs. Church consultant Jon M. Huegli, in describing the way that structure affects a church's organization, agrees: "Today's congregational structures were designed to support programmatic work, sets of activities that repeat and perpetuate themselves." Such programs are static, routine, and predictable.²⁸

The use of standardized programs tends to produce the parts of a machine. In characterizing 'modern discipleship' as linear, Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer use the example of an assembly line, with the new believer as the product:

Insert non-Christian raw material here, start conveyer belt, pass raw material through evangelism chute, progress through follow-up treatment, insert knowledge in linear fashion modeled after modern education systems . . . , fine-polish with books 1 through 7 in discipleship series, add optional leadership development features and plop! Off the conveyer belt falls a mature Christian.²⁹

This description of discipleship is that of a one-size-fits-all program. As most people have discovered, one-size-fits-all sometimes does and sometimes does not fit. For example, gloves often are labeled "One-size-fits-all." If a particular person tries on the gloves, the gloves may fit, the gloves may go on halfway if the individual's hand is large, or the gloves may be much too large for a small hand. Each person's hand is similar but will be different from other people's hands in length of fingers, the size of the hand, or the shape of the hand (for example, if the hand is misshapen by rheumatism or injury). In the same way,

²⁸ Jon M. Huegli, "Riding the Waves of Change," in *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, Eng.: Eerdmans, 1999), 286.

²⁹ Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 185. Greg Ogden echoes this idea: "When the process is completed, disciples are supposed to pop out the other end of the production line." Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 45.

not every new believer is alike. Some new believers have grown up in the church; some have never held a Bible before. Some new believers are quick learners; some learn more slowly. Some learn visually. Some learn by hearing and some by doing. Some new believers may not be able to read or to write. George Barna has found that standardized discipleship programs expect “all to ‘get it’ at the same time and in the same way.”³⁰

One-size-fits-all programs are undoubtedly easier to administer. Such programs also foster top-down control. A guide published for boards of Christian education warns that the board must choose Christian-education curriculum, not the teachers (which will create a ‘hodgepodge’). It is implied that the board should choose a single curriculum series for the entire Christian-education program.³¹ The board must maintain control to ensure the desired end product.

Rather than facilitating transformation, one-size-fits-all programs may force conformity (either intentionally or by their inherent nature) instead of enabling spiritual transformation. In speaking about the church’s use of standardized programs rather than individually oriented approaches such as mentoring or coaching, George Barna states that the use of such programs is a way to maintain control. Standardized programs are “often embraced as a way to organize large groups of people into an orderly process that can be easily managed and controlled.”³² However, because people are different, the effort to control with the use of one-size-fits-all programs will leave some people behind.

The use of standardized programs in the local church may be common because long-time church members seem to instinctively understand and fear what

³⁰ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 91.

³¹ Kenneth D. Blazier and Linda R. Isham, ed. *The Teaching Church at Work: A Manual for the Board of Christian Education*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1993), 22.

³² George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 93

chaos theory shows. Even slight variances can totally change a system, as Edward Lorenz postulated in what is called the ‘butterfly effect.’ James Gleick describes this effect:

Tiny differences in input could quickly become overwhelming differences in output—a phenomenon given the name “sensitive dependence on initial conditions.” In weather, for example, this translates into what is only half-jokingly known as the Butterfly Effect—the notion that a butterfly stirring the air today in Peking can transform storm systems next month in New York.³³

A new person in an established church is, often, an unwanted, threatening variable, the new butterfly eagerly testing its wings. The intention of programs developed for these individuals seems to be to produce conformity with the established system, that is, to inhibit and control these potential change agents.³⁴ Bill Easum and Tom Bandy agree, stating that the traditional top-down-control church tries to convert spiritual seekers into “customized institutional cogs for the mechanism.”³⁵ Some churches have a required ‘Discipleship 101’ class for new persons, in which they are taught what it means to be a Methodist, a Lutheran, a member of *this* church. These classes seem meant to produce an acceptable church member.

As physicist F. David Peat points out, chaos theory “shows us the ultimate futility of trying to control and manipulate the world in a machinelike manner.”³⁶ A comment by church consultant Henry Klopp regarding strategic planning for churches illustrates the ‘ultimate futility’ of a local church’s trying to control both itself and the world around it. Klopp states, “Good planning takes into account all possible variables and produces a clear plan demonstrating how best to chart

³³ James Gleick, *Chaos*, 8.

³⁴ Jon M. Huegli, “Riding the Waves of Change,” 286.

³⁵ Bill Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, 113.

³⁶ F. David Peat, *The Philosopher’s Stone: Chaos, Synchronicity, and the Hidden Order of the World* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1991), 162.

a course during difficult times.”³⁷ Perhaps God can “take into account all possible variables,” but human beings cannot do so, no matter how intuitive they may be. Bill Easum points out that the desire to maintain control is the characteristic of “the present form of institutional religion. . . . After all, committees and staff can be managed and controlled, but the gifts of the Spirit can’t be kept under one’s thumb.”³⁸ Can the church dare to abandon itself to the ‘control’ of the Holy Spirit, to a God who created, not a machine, but a living, dynamic world?

Barna also advocates letting go of control. His position is that “growing true disciples is not about maintaining tight control. It is about letting go to see what God, through His Holy Spirit, can do in the life of a believer who truly wants to mature in Christ.”³⁹ Control by the institution inhibits the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, as Danah Zohar points out, the quest for control sacrifices freedom and creativity. The instability that comes from releasing the attempt to maintain total control leads to creativity in a system.⁴⁰ If transformation is the goal of a process to facilitate the spiritual growth of each new believer, the local church needs to be open to exchanging its need for control and the familiarity of one-size-fits-all programs for the creativity of a process that includes *all* new believers, whatever their learning styles and background. The church must go beyond its fear of instability and chaos and release control to the liberating power of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

³⁷ Henry Klopp, *The Ministry Playbook: Strategic Planning for Effective Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Baker Book House, 2002), 30.

³⁸ Bill Easum, *Unfreezing Moves: Following Jesus into the Mission Field*, The Convergence eBook Series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 34.

³⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 93, 4.

⁴⁰ Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, 82.

⁴¹ Ray Anderson describes the praxis of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost as ‘liberation.’ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 108, 112.

3. Relationships must be a priority.

In the Newtonian paradigm, the parts of the machine, while they work together, are separate and individual. For example, all the parts of an automobile must work correctly and together to produce the motion of the car. However, the parts do not interact with one another; the tires do not interact with the fuel injection system; the fan belt does not interact with the exhaust pipe. If some part of the car does not perform its function, one simply goes to the mechanic to get the part fixed or replaced. The physical world was no different from an automobile—understandable, controllable, certain, and separated into autonomous parts.

In contrast, in the new science the world is seen—and can only be seen—as being in relationship. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity began to change the Newtonian paradigm. Priest and social psychologist Diarmuid O'Murchu observes that Einstein posited that "things can be understood only *relative* (i.e., in relation) to each other, not independent of, nor isolated from, each other, as absolute values."⁴²

In the microworld of elementary particles—quanta—a particle can be a fixed object in a particular place or a wave or both at the same time. Physicist Curt Supplee describes this phenomenon as one of the conundrums facing physicists in the early 20th century. Supplee explains that "light was not exactly a wave; an electron was not altogether a particle. Each was somehow both a wave and a particle *at the same time* and could act as either one or the other as circumstances required."⁴³ One can only ascertain whether, at a particular point in time, a quantum is a particle or a wave by observing its relationship with other quanta. Danah Zohar describes quantum physics as the science of "patterns of dynamic energy" in relationship; "Quantum entities

⁴² Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 26.

⁴³ Curt Supplee, *Physics in the 20th Century*, ed. Judy R. Franz and John S. Rigden (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the American Physical Society and the American Institute of Physics, 1999; paperback ed. 2002), 64.

have no fully fixed identity until they are in relationship."⁴⁴ In the world of quanta, relationships are fundamental.

In the new science there are no separate parts at the quantum level, the level of particles. Fritjof Capra describes the world at the level of particles as a "complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole."⁴⁵ The new physics (quantum physics) is not a study of the parts of a machine but is a study of relationships. As physicists have tried to go deeper and deeper into the heart of the atom they find not a final, ultimate particle, but more and more particles. Capra describes the centrality of the relationship between these sub-atomic particles:

Subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities but can be understood only as interconnections, or correlations, between various processes of observation and measurement, . . .

Subatomic particles, then, are not "things" but are interconnections between "things," and these "things," in turn, are interconnections between other "things," and so on. In quantum theory you never end up with "things"; you always deal with interconnections.⁴⁶

'A web of relations.' An interconnected network of relationships. This concept of interconnection is the concept of the church that the Apostle Paul articulated. The 'each otherness' that the Holy Spirit creates through the grace of God's love for us manifested in Jesus Christ is the 'web of relations' that is the church.

Fritjof Capra uses the image of the 'web of life' to illustrate the centrality of relationships within living systems. Capra describes 'the web of life' as 'interdependence': "All members of an ecological community are interconnected in

⁴⁴ Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, 46, 50.

⁴⁵ Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1983), 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

a vast and intricate network of relationships, the web of life.” In an ecosystem, each part of the community exists in its relationship to the other members of the community. Capra observes, “The behavior of every living member of the ecosystem depends on the behavior of many others. . . . Understanding ecological interdependence means understanding relationships.”⁴⁷

Relationships are crucial in the quantum world and in living systems. Relationships are crucial in fellowship among Christians, as we have seen from the Epistles of Paul. As Stan Grenz emphasizes,

In the postmodern world, we can no longer . . . position the individual at center stage. Instead, we must remind ourselves that our faith is highly social. The fact that God is the social Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—gives us some indication that the divine purpose for creation is directed toward the individual-in-relationship.⁴⁸

Placing a priority on relationships will help to create a flexible and adaptable spiritual-growth process.

4. The local church must take into account the environment in which the local church exists and the new believer lives.

Systems theory, another field of the new science, centers upon relationships—“how human beings interact with the world around them.”⁴⁹ Systems theory pioneer Ervin Laszlo contrasts the Newtonian ‘atomistic’ view and the systems view:

The classical worldview was atomistic and individualistic; it viewed objects as separate from their environments and people as separate from each other and from their surroundings. The systems view per-

⁴⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1996), 298.

⁴⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer On Postmodernism* (Cambridge, Eng. and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 168, 9.

⁴⁹ Ervin Laszlo, *The Systems View of the World: A Holistic Vision for Our Time*, *Advances in Systems Theory, Complexity, and the Human Sciences*, ed. Alfonso Montuori (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996), viii.

ceives connections and communications between people, and between people and nature, and emphasizes community and integrity in both the natural and the human world.⁵⁰

The local church is not atomistic, an isolated entity. It is a part of the place in which its building is situated and where its people gather for worship, fellowship, and teaching. The economic conditions in the community, the community's demographics, and the changes that occur in the community impact the church.⁵¹

The local church, as much it may try to insulate itself from the world, is not a closed system. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the 'father' of systems theory, defines a 'closed system' as "a static system closed to the outside and always containing the identical components."⁵² Churches are rather 'open systems.' In an open system, "material continually enters from, and leaves into, the outside environment."⁵³ Open systems are in 'dynamic balance,' "characterized by continual flow and change."⁵⁴ The church is a living system, made up of living, interacting beings. In applying the new science to innovative businesses, Thomas Petzinger observes, "Everything alive is an open system that engages with its environment and continues to grow and evolve."⁵⁵ The church, a living system, is an open system, engaging with its environment.

If a local church has a Newtonian worldview, it can imagine itself as sepa-

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ The issue of how the church remains 'in the world but not of it' must be noted. In a study of congregations in America, James P. Wind and James W. Lewis note the two extremes faced by congregational churches. One is extreme withdrawal, the other excessive conformity with the local environment. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, ed., *American Congregations*, vol. 2, *New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations* (Chicago, IL and London, Eng.: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 83.

⁵² Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York, NY: Brazilller, 1968), 129; quoted in Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life*, 48.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life*, 48.

⁵⁵ Thomas Petzinger, *The New Pioneers*, 77. To be alive is to engage with our environment not to isolate or insulate ourselves from it. This concept should lead to excitement about evangelism and learning to be a follower of Jesus as we live our lives in the world.

rate from its outside environment (and from other local churches). Bill Easum and Tom Bandy make the case that the local church is an integral part of its environment. In their book, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, they describe the church as an organism rather than as a machine to be controlled. Their metaphor for the church as organism is the redwood tree. They emphasize, “Spiritual Redwoods are not machines. They are not foreign bodies intruding upon culture, for the purpose of manipulating culture. They are organisms.”⁵⁶ The redwood tree is connected to its environment in every way. Its roots spread under (and sometimes above) the ground. The health and life of the tree depend upon air, sunlight, and nutrients from its environment. The environment in which the tree lives can injure it or even kill it. A tree is part of its environment. In the same way, a local church is not “a foreign body intruding upon culture” but is “made of the same stuff and substance as culture itself.” Therefore, Easum and Bandy note, the “health of the church and the health of the community” are a “single issue.”⁵⁷

In the same way that the local church is an integral part of its environment, the new believer is also an integral part of her environment. She lives in the environment outside the believing community and will feel the tension between her new life in Christ and her life the world. How is the new believer to interact with non-Christian family members, friends and co-workers? What new relationships can support her new belief? A process for the spiritual growth of new believers, if it is to treat new believers as whole individuals, must help new believers to understand, to deal with, and even to embrace these tensions between life in the world and their new belief.

The environment in which the church exists must also be a factor in designing a process for the spiritual growth of new believers. Is the environment

⁵⁶ William Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, 114.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

openly hostile to the Christian community? Is there a large presence of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or non-believers who prefer to fish, snowmobile, or hike on Sundays? If so, the process can give the new believer insights into how to respond to these influences.

5. Integrate new believers into the church immediately rather than isolating them from the rest of the congregation.

Churches often hold 'discipleship,' seekers or new-member classes at times and places when other church members are not present. Henry Klopp insists that most churches would agree that separate new-member classes are a mission of the church.⁵⁸ In such a church, new believers are seen as 'them,' not really a part of 'us.' The church sets new believers apart from other church members.

However, new believers *are* a part of the church as a whole. As Margaret Wheatley observes, "A system is composed of parts, but we cannot understand a system by looking only at its parts. We need to *work with the whole of a system*, even as we work with individual parts or isolated problems."⁵⁹ The individual parts of a system do not exist in isolation; all the individual parts are in relationship. In the individual parts, we see the working of the whole.⁶⁰ In fact, we can understand the whole only by understanding the interaction of the parts that make up the whole.⁶¹

The church is the church because of all of its members, however new or seasoned each member may be. The church is a whole, more than just the sum of its individual members. Danah Zohar compares the quantum system with the 'quantum organization':

⁵⁸ Henry Klopp, *The Ministry Playbook*, 165.

⁵⁹ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 139.

⁶⁰ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1993), 3-12.

⁶¹ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1996), 11.

The particle-like aspect is the hereness and nowness of the entity—its actuality. But the wavelike aspect represents all its future possibility. In quantum systems, . . . relationship creates further possibility. A quantum whole C is larger than the sum of its parts $A + B$. Each quantum “individual” has a *further* group potentiality. A quantum organization would seek to capitalize on this insight. It would build infrastructures that bypass the old individual-versus-group dichotomy, infrastructures that allow individuals to flourish both as individuals and as members of larger creative groups.⁶²

As we have seen, there can be no believer who follows Jesus Christ alone, separated from the church as a whole. When one becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, one becomes part of the church. The church is more than merely the ‘sum of its parts,’ the sum of all of its members. The church is the community created by the Holy Spirit. The discipleship process must recognize that the individual believer grows *and* that the believer grows as a part of a local church. For the new believer to ‘flourish’ in the church as the community of the Holy Spirit, he must be a part of the whole.

A spiritual-growth process must consider the church as a whole with its fear of change, its established relationships, and its emotional realities if the process is to result in transformation, not merely conformation. The whole church impacts the individual believer, just as the individual impacts the whole. Business executives Susanne Kelly and Mary Ann Allison, who have written on complexity science, discuss the feedback effect of chaos theory on people: “People co-evolve with one another. It’s a recursive cycle—individual people shape the group they’re in, which in turn shapes the people, which shapes the group—feed-back.”⁶³ Added to this idea that the whole and the individual are impacting each other is the work of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of both the individual and the church.

⁶² Danah Zohar, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, 55.

⁶³ Susanne Kelly and Mary Ann Allison, “Chaos Theory Offers Insights into How Teams Function,” interview by Miles Maguire, *Quality Progress* 6 (1999): 42.

In F. David Peat's description of the growth of quasi crystals, we see the implications of the work of the Holy Spirit. In the growth of a regular crystal, each new atom joins the crystal in a way that minimizes energy. However, in the growth of a quasi crystal, each new atom positions itself based on the pattern of the whole structure. Peat observes that "the position of each atom in a quasi crystal must somehow reflect the restrictions of the global form demanded by the crystal as a whole. It is as if additional information about the global form of the whole crystal determines the final orientation of each incoming atom. . . ."⁶⁴ Each atom entering the quasi crystal seems to know the whole pattern and to fit itself into the whole, not just into the place where it feels stable. In the same way, in the local church is the pattern of the whole. In the local church, which itself is a part of the church as a whole (the universal church), the Holy Spirit is creating more than just a conglomeration of parts. The Holy Spirit is creating a whole and infinitely (and eternally) larger form than just that of the local church or the individual believer.

Because the local church is a whole, not just a collection of parts, new believers must have places to connect with other, established parts of the 'system'—the local church members. Such connection cannot be 'hit or miss, dependent upon the friendliness of some individual. Places must be intentionally provided for new believers to enter the fabric of the local church as soon as possible. Ideally, these places will facilitate spiritual growth, not merely help to fashion an acceptable part of the machine or to create new parts to keep the machine running. In the final chapter, we will explore possibilities for effecting the connection of new believers with established church members.

⁶⁴ F. David Peat, *The Philosopher's Stone*, 95. See his discussion of quasi crystals on 91-6.

6. The local church must become a flexible structure that places a priority upon the spiritual growth of its members.

Perhaps what makes facilitating the spiritual growth of new believers in the local church a problem is the attitude of the local church. The local church, if it wants new life at all and not merely higher membership figures, may really want to create parts of a machine that will adapt to the status quo. It may neither desire nor accept the new life, energy, and fresh viewpoints that new believers bring.

As Bill Easum observes, when churches that have a 'top-down, command-and-control' structure are pushed to change to a more flexible structure, these churches often revert to the top-down, controlling structure.⁶⁵ The 'command-and-control' model creates a church that resembles a brick wall. It is hard for an outsider, a 'new person,' to penetrate its rigid structures.

Creating a flexible process for the spiritual growth of new believers that will withstand the tendency of the local church to revert to inflexibility will be difficult. In a church that has a penchant for control, new people cause fear—the potential for change. The church instinctively understands the principle articulated by Mark Ward that “adding energy to a system, . . . tends to drive it to a new state.”⁶⁶ A common example is heating water to boiling. Adding the energy of heat to liquid H₂O changes the liquid to steam. Adding the energy (and new ideas) of new believers to an established church creates new possibilities as the new believers react with established church members.

As we have seen, the new science shows that, there is no reason for a church to resist or fear new life. New life is essential for growth, health, creativity, stability, and the continuation of life. If a spiritual-growth process is to lead to a lifetime

⁶⁵ Bill Easum, *Unfreezing Moves*, 38-9.

⁶⁶ Mark Ward, *Beyond Chaos: The Underlying Theory Behind Life, the Universe, and Everything* (Great Britain: Macmillan, n.d.; New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 57.

of spiritual transformation for the new believer, the church as a whole, as a system, must become flexible and adaptable. The church must understand that it is participating in the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not static; the Holy Spirit is in motion. Jesus portrays the Holy Spirit as “wind, that blows wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). Acts 2:2-3 describes the Spirit in the active images of roaring wind and tongues of fire. Like the Holy Spirit, nature is also in motion. Margaret Wheatley observes: “Rather than building a rigid organization piece by stable piece, nature keeps things freely moving at all levels. These movements emerge into something new—an integrated system that can resist most demands for change at the global level because there is so much internal motion.”⁶⁷ In a local church that understands that it is working together with the Holy Spirit and is not afraid of new life, the local church becomes flexible—a moving system.

A local church will become flexible by letting go of the need for control and surrendering itself to the control of the Holy Spirit. To achieve flexibility, the local church must embrace transformation and come to see new life as an exciting possibility. Susanne Kelly and Mary Ann Allison observe that “change has to infect a behavioral environment like a virus—and some organizations have a phenomenal immune system in place!”⁶⁸ In the final chapter, we will propose that the transformation of the local church can begin with the spiritual growth of its leaders.

In this chapter I have shown that the new science gives insights that can help the local church design a process in which it can work with the Holy Spirit to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers in a way that leads to the transformation of the new believer and health and life for the local church. Six concepts discerned from the new science have been adduced. In the next chapter I will con-

⁶⁷ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 167.

⁶⁸ Miles Maguire interview with Susanne Kelly and Mary Ann Allison, 42.

sider how church leaders have attempted to work with the Holy Spirit in the spiritual transformation of new believers and how their approaches reflect the insights we have discovered from the new science. I will also identify elements of their approaches that will further inform the creation of a spiritual-growth process.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOUR MODELS

In this chapter we will consider four models the church has used to facilitate a new believer's "engaged, participatory encounter" with Jesus Christ.¹ We examine Augustine's method of catechesis as set out in *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, John Wesley's class meetings, and the Willow Creek Community Church's small-group system. I discuss how these models reflect or conflict with the six concepts I have proposed from the new science. I also note several additional ways in which these approaches can contribute to the design of a spiritual-growth process.

The Catechumenate and Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus*

Introduction to the Catechumenate

The catechumenate of the early centuries of the church was a time of training for new believers. Any pronouncements on the specifics of the catechumenate will be somewhat speculative. The studies that have been done on the catechumenate do not agree on the specific elements this time of training included, primarily because there is little way of knowing how various regions of the church practiced catechesis

¹ In the words of Brennan Manning, "The greatest single need in the church today is to know Jesus Christ through engaged, participatory encounter," to have "the actual experience of the living Jesus. . . ." Brennan Manning, *The Wisdom of Tenderness: What Happens When God's Fierce Mercy Transforms Our Lives* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 170.

other than glimpses found in the writings of the church fathers. The conclusion reached by Paul F. Bradshaw, professor of liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, in an article outlining his study of the third-century catechumenate, is:

At least in some Christian communities in the second and third centuries there was a custom of reserving certain teachings to those in the final stages of preparation for baptism and not allowing them to be more widely known to the unbaptized, a custom that lingered on in some places into the fourth century and even later. . . .²

The catechumenate had several purposes. The church in the third century faced persecution. One purpose of the catechumenate was to enable believers to learn to defend their faith and thus to be able to withstand persecution.³ Also, because the nature of Christian doctrine was unsettled, leading to conflicting ideas of what was orthodox and what was ‘heresy,’ another purpose of the catechumenate was to test the sincerity of new believers to prevent perpetrators of heretical doctrines from infiltrating the church. The catechumenate was meant to ‘preserve the distinctiveness of the church’ by teaching doctrine, scrutinizing a candidate’s morals, and helping new believers understand what was required of them as Christians and members of the church.⁴ As church historian Robert Sider observes, the catechumenate was “a period of intensive preparation for assuming the rights and responsibilities of professing the name of Christ.”⁵

The catechumenate may have included four different stages.⁶ The inquirer,

² Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Gospel and the Catechumenate in the Third Century,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 150.

³ T. B. Scannell, “Catechumen,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (n.p.: The Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/0343b.htm>> (10 Dec. 2003), I.

⁴ Everett Ferguson, introduction to *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, vol. 11, *Studies in Early Christianity* (New York, NY and London, Eng.: Garland Publishing, 1993), xii.

⁵ Robert D. Sider, *The Gospel and its Proclamation*, vol. 10, *Message of the Fathers of the Church*, ed. Thomas Halton (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 176.

⁶ These stages are often called ‘classes’ of catechumens. Robert Webber calls ‘classes’ of catechumens ‘stages of formation’ which may be a less controversial term. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 24.

or hearer, was one who came to the church with little or no knowledge of the churches doctrines. During this initial period, the inquirer received instruction in basic Christian doctrine. To move on from this stage, the inquirer was required to show that he was sincere in his desire to be baptized.⁷ The next stage was the catechumenate proper. An inquirer did not become a catechumen until he had proven that he was worthy of further instruction.⁸ The catechumens “were part of the Christian community and were regarded as Christians” although they were not considered church members.⁹ They participated in worship services up to the time of the Eucharist, were given doctrinal instruction, memorized the Creed, were examined on whether they lived a moral life, and practiced silence, prayer, and fasting. Scannell notes that “the duration of this stage was not fixed. In general it lasted long enough to test the dispositions of the catechumen.”¹⁰ After a period of instruction, the catechumen had to apply for admission to the third stage—further intensive preparation for baptism. After baptism, one became a ‘neophyte.’ Instruction may have then been given on the Holy Spirit and the meaning of the Eucharist.

It is significant that the local church as a whole had a relationship with the catechumens. Church historian Michel Dujarier states, “The witness of the martyrs, dialogue with other Christians, and the life of the community awakened the faith of converts. The community then took charge of them and led them on the catechumenal

⁷ T. B. Scannell, “Catechumen,” II(1).

⁸ Lawrence D. Folkemer, “A Study of the Catechumenate,” in *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, vol. 11, Studies in Early Christianity (New York, NY and London, Eng.: Garland Publishing, 1993), 247.

⁹ Ibid., 245. That catechumens were considered Christians is also stated by T. B. Scannell: The catechumen “was now entitled to be called a Christian, though he was not looked upon as one of the ‘faithful’ [church members]. ‘Ask a man, “Are you a Christian?” He answers, “No”, if he is a pagan or a Jew. But if he says “Yes”, ask him again. “Are you a catechumen or one of the faithful?”’ (St. Aug., ‘In Joan’, xiv, 2, P.L., XXXV, 1714).” T.B. Scannell, “Catechumen,” II (2).

¹⁰ Ibid., II(1).

journey.”¹¹ Justin Martyr confirms the involvement of the church with the catechumens (at least in the second century) in his *First Apology*: “Those who are convinced and believe what we say and teach is the truth, and pledge themselves to be able to live accordingly, are taught in prayer and fasting to ask God to forgive their past sins, while we pray and fast with them.”¹²

It is also important that what the catechumens were taught was not just intellectual knowledge. Paul F. Bradshaw observes that on the basis of his research, “It rather looks as though it was behaving that was the prerequisite to belonging in the early church. . . .”¹³ Catechumens received a careful examination of their leisure activities, their vocations, and their personal life to determine the sincerity of their hearts. The qualities required of one who would advance to baptism were honest repentance, self-denial, and self-renunciation.¹⁴

Augustine’s *De Catechizandis Rudibus*

A fourth-century work that delineates specific catechetical methods is Augustine’s *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. This work shows how Augustine practiced catechesis.

It is true that in this work Augustine discusses the initial teaching of prospective converts to Christianity who may already have had some knowledge of Jesus Christ. Professor Joseph Christopher, the translator of the edition of *De Catechizandis Rudibus* used in this chapter, defines ‘*rudis*,’ when applied to “one

¹¹ Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. Edward J. Haas (New York, NY: William H. Sadler, 1979), 71.

¹² Justin Martyr, *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, vol. 6, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press in association with Consortium Books, 1948), 99. Lawrence Folkemer and T. B. Scannell cite this passage as evidence of the involvement of the church in the catechumenate: Lawrence Folkemer, “A Study of the Catechumenate,” 253; T. B. Scannell, “Catechumen,” 1.

¹³ Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Gospel and the Catechumenate,” 152.

¹⁴ Lawrence D. Folkemer, “A Study of the Catechumenate,” 251, 2.

seeking admission to the catechumenate,” as referring “to his being *untaught* in matters concerning the Christian religion which he wished to embrace.”¹⁵ This definition describes those new believers who are returning to the church, but have little or no knowledge of Christian doctrine or understanding of the way of Christian life, despite the fact that, due to their having been baptized in a Christian church at some time in the past, they may be eligible to become church members.

Augustine writes *De Catechizandis Rudibus* to Deogratias, a deacon of the church at Carthage, who asked Augustine for help in his work as a catechist. Deogratias wanted to know how he could keep from being boring (or bored) as he taught new believers.

Augustine gives suggestions for teaching to the catechist. Augustine then provides one long and one short sample instruction. At the end of the instruction, Augustine concludes by asking the candidate “whether he believes these things and desires to observe them. And when he answers that he does, you should of course sign him, with due ceremony, and deal with him in accordance with the custom of the Church.”¹⁶ The candidate was then given exorcised salt.¹⁷ The exorcised and blessed salt was placed on the candidate’s tongue. The candidate would be told that the salt was not ‘everyday salt,’ but was a symbol that, by his belief, he has been preserved, purified, and cleansed.¹⁸

¹⁵ Joseph P. Christopher, introduction to St. Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction* [*De Catechizandis Rudibus*], trans. and annot. Joseph P. Christopher, vol. 2, *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York, NY: Newman Press, Paulist Press, 1946), 4.

¹⁶ Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction* [*De Catechizandis Rudibus*], trans. and annot. Joseph P. Christopher, vol. 2, *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York, NY: Newman Press, Paulist Press, 1946), 82.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. and fn. 316. Gerhard Lohfink adds, “The *salt* that was placed on the catechumens’ tongues in a special ritual was to show that the new thing cannot be grasped only with reason. It must be tasted, and only the taste of truth and the beauty of faith make it possible for the baptismal candidates to go their new way in genuine freedom.” Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (West Germany: Herder, 1998; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 269.

Interface with the Six Concepts from the New Science

The method Augustine sets out in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* uses three of the six concepts that we have discerned from the new science.

A Creative Process

The process will require creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program. Augustine uses either lecture or discussion in his teaching, depending on the candidate. As Joseph Christopher notes:

Augustine . . . combines the acroamatic [lecture] and the erotematic [question-and-answer] method: the former he uses to impart the knowledge of Christian doctrine; the latter, to guide him in his choice of subject matter and method of presentation, so that the discourse might be adapted to the capacity and peculiarities of the candidate.¹⁹

Augustine chooses his method of teaching a candidate according to the individual's reasons for coming for instruction. His preferred method of determining the individual's reasons was to ask the one who had brought him. However, if there was no one to speak for the candidate, Augustine questions the candidate himself "so that from his answers we may draw an opening for our instruction."²⁰

Augustine also uses different teaching methods for different persons and particular situations. In chapter 8, Augustine addresses how to teach the 'educated'—those who already know the Scriptures—and in chapter 9, how to address 'students of grammar and rhetoric.' In chapter 13, section 18, Augustine discusses how to teach those who give no indication of how they are responding to the teaching. In this case, he tries to find out why the candidate is silent—is she afraid, 'slow-witted,' in awe of the catechist, uncomprehending or tired? Is she already familiar with the teaching? Augustine's method includes the opportunity for interaction

¹⁹ Augustine. *The First Catechetical Instruction*, fn. 125.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

with the *rudis* by giving the candidate the freedom to ask questions: “[We] must give him confidence so that if he thinks there is an objection to make he may freely lay it before us.”²¹

For Augustine there is neither a one-size-fits-all *rudis* nor a one-size-fits-all catechist. Each catechist is an individual. In chapter 10, Augustine addresses various problems that may be affecting the catechist and gives suggestions for how to cope with each situation so that the catechist will “produce a calm and agreeable discourse.”²²

The Priority of Relationships

For Augustine, the relationship between the catechist and the *rudis* was paramount. The basis of the instruction of the *rudis* was the relationship between the catechist and the *rudis*.²³ The preliminary instruction of those with little or no knowledge of the Christian faith had to be individual and personal. Although the instruction was normally given in a short period of time at one sitting, Augustine adjures the catechist not just to recite, read, or teach by rote, but to have a relationship with the individual. The catechist must try to understand the motives of the one he is teaching, what knowledge the *rudis* has, the *rudis*’ intellectual level, how the *rudis* understands the teaching and any problems that he may have that make it difficult for him to learn. Augustine, responding to Deogratias’ concern over the apathy of those whom Deogratias was teaching, instructs:

We must by questioning him find out whether he understands; . . .
We must at the same time enquire of him whether he has ever
heard these things before. . . . We must then act in accordance with
his answer, so as either to speak more clearly and simply, or to refute
a contrary opinion, or not to set forth at greater length things that

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Ibid., 47.

²³ As we can see in comparing the discussion regarding a creative process and this section, there is repetition between the two concepts. The delineation of separate concepts is only for the ease of discussion. In reality, the six concepts are connected (in relationship!) with one another.

are familiar to him. . . . But if he is exceedingly slow-witted, and out of accord with and averse to every such inducement, we should bear with him in a compassionate spirit. . . .²⁴

For Augustine, every person was an individual to be taught in the way that he can understand and, in understanding, believe.

Integration of the New Believer into the Local Church

The local church must integrate new believers into the church immediately rather than isolating them from the rest of the congregation. Augustine teaches, after the session of instruction, the one who has indicated that he believes what the catechist has taught and has been given exorcised salt would become a catechumen and begin to worship with the whole congregation. The new believer was never isolated from those in the local church even though she may have had her first lesson alone or in the presence of other inquirers.

Additional Application for the Creation of A Spiritual-Growth Process

Also instructive for the development of a spiritual-growth process for new believers in the local church is the content of Augustine's catechesis. In chapter 3 of *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Augustine discusses the substance of his teaching. Augustine believed that it was important to teach both the Old Testament and the New Testament. He taught, "Christ came chiefly for this reason that man might learn how much God loves him, . . . All divine Scripture that was written before was written to foretell the coming of the Lord, . . ."²⁵ For Augustine, the whole of Scripture shows the love of God given through Jesus Christ. In the often-quoted words of Augustine, "In the Old Testament the New is concealed, and in the New

²⁴ Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, 43.

²⁵ Ibid., 23.

the Old is revealed.”²⁶ The love of God is the basis of Augustine’s teaching: “With this love, then, set before you as an end to which you may refer all that you say, so give all your instructions that he to whom you speak by hearing may believe, and by believing may hope, and by hoping may love.”²⁷ The design of the spiritual-growth process for new believers should include a consideration of both the Old and New Testaments. As we will see in the final chapter, the process of sharing and experiencing the story of the love of God given through Jesus Christ will be designed to inspire belief, hope and love.

Summary

We have seen that in his catechesis of inquirers, Augustine uses three of the six concepts from the new science that I have proposed.²⁸ For Augustine, teaching the one coming to the church for baptism is not a one-size-fits-all exercise. What to teach and how to teach must be based upon the individual *rudis*. The relationship between the catechist and the *rudis* is fundamental. In Augustine’s experience, the catechist can only know what to teach and how to teach it through the relationship that the catechist establishes with the *rudis*. The new believer was not isolated from the rest of the congregation (the ‘faithful’), but joined with the church in worship after he had given evidence that he believed what he had heard. Augustine emphasizes that the teacher can motivate himself by understanding that each person coming for instruction represents an exciting opportunity to take part in God’s work in the life of that person.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 24.

²⁸ The science may be ‘new’ but these concepts transcend our labels ‘premodern,’ ‘modern,’ ‘postmodern,’ and ‘pre-Christian.’

²⁹ See, for example, chapter 14, section 21.

The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola

Introduction

The 16th-century nobleman Ignatius (née Ignatio) was born in Spain in 1491. Although his father had dreams that his son would become a cleric, Ignatius chose the life of a soldier. Ignatius was bedridden after his leg, shattered in a battle, was immobilized. Bored and wanting to read “some tales of knight-errantry wherein distressed and lovely ladies were rescued by gallant gentlemen like himself,” Ignatius found the only reading material available was a life of Christ and a volume of the lives of the saints (considered “mere women’s reading”). Through these books God began to work in Ignatius’ heart.³⁰

With the same fervor as he had fought the French, Ignatius now determined to live an ascetic life, although he admits “all his purpose was to do those great outward works because the saints had done them for the glory of God.”³¹ While on pilgrimage to Barcelona in 1522, Ignatius detoured through the town of Manresa. Due to quarantine and the Pope’s failure to approve Ignatius’ pilgrimage, Ignatius spent the next ten months in Manresa. Legend has it that in a moment of clarity, Ignatius received ‘an understanding of spiritual things’ and wrote them in his notebook.³² What he wrote was the main sketch of the *Spiritual Exercises* to which he added until about 1540 “as he himself progressed in his knowledge of God and his understanding of human nature.”³³ Throughout his life, Ignatius directed others in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Regarding the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves, different commentators

³⁰ James Broderick, *The Origin of the Jesuits* (London, Eng.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940; reprint, 1947), 10, 11.

³¹ *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, Monumenta Ignatiana*, Scripta de Sancto Ignatio, vol. 1, 101, quoted in Broderick, *The Origin of the Jesuits*, 12.

³² James Broderick, *The Origin of the Jesuits*, 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

have different ideas of the purpose of undertaking the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius writes in the First Annotation to the *Spiritual Exercises*, that by “preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies,” one will “seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul. . . .”³⁴ One ‘disposes the soul’ to understand God’s will by imitating the life of Christ. The form of the *Exercises* is a retreat of four ‘weeks,’ each week devoted to meditation and prayer on one phase of the life of Christ.

The *Spiritual Exercises* were not intended primarily for the spiritual growth of new believers. However, one of the reasons that Ignatius and his friends wanted to establish an order that would teach the *Spiritual Exercises* was because Ignatius was appalled by the ignorance of those in the churches and the failure of their priests, whether lazy or unwilling, to remedy that ignorance.³⁵ *The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus* states that the *Spiritual Exercises* would serve to instruct “children and unlettered persons in Christianity.”³⁶ Therefore, as in the case of Augustine’s catechesis, the spiritual state of those Ignatius wanted to teach is the same as those for whom the spiritual-growth process is being designed—believers in the church who know little of the matters of the Christian faith.

Interface with the Six Concepts from the New Science

A Creative Process

We see in Ignatius’ own words the application of the concept that the process will be creative rather than one-size-fits-all. The *Spiritual Exercises* is

³⁴David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*, Studies on Jesuit Topics, Series 4, no. 17 (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 4.

³⁵James Broderick *The Origin of the Jesuits*, 71.

³⁶Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translation, introduction and commentary by George E. Ganss (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 66.

not an instruction manual to be strictly followed. It is, rather, a set of guidelines, primarily for the use of the director of the *Exercises*. The director is “the person who gives to another the way and order in which to meditate or contemplate. . .” (Second Annotation), who guides the one ‘receiving’ the *Exercises*.³⁷ The director, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,³⁸ observes the one receiving the *Exercises* (hereinafter referred to as the ‘exercitant’) to determine the most helpful way of leading that person during the *Exercises*. The Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Annotations assist the director in determining how much to explain to the exercitant, based on observing the exercitant during the *Exercises*. The Eighteenth Annotation states:

The Spiritual Exercises have to be adapted to the dispositions of the persons who wish to receive them, that is, to their age, education, or ability, in order not to give to one who is uneducated or of little intelligence things he cannot easily bear and profit by.

Again, that should be given to each one by which, according to his wish to dispose himself, he may be better able to help himself and to profit.³⁹

Even the form of the ‘retreat’ is open to adaptation. Although a true retreat is advisable (Twentieth Annotation), a ‘retreat in everyday life’ in which the exercitant sets aside one and one half hours a day for the *Exercises* and continues to do his daily work in the world, is also possible (Nineteenth Annotation). The four ‘weeks’ may not be seven-day weeks, depending on the response of the individual exercitant (Fourth Annotation).

³⁷ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 4, 16.

³⁸ “The Holy Spirit is the prime retreat master; the director is only His docile instrument.” Robert W. Gleason, introduction to *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Company, 1964), 23.

³⁹ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 16. It is noted here that it is important for the director to understand the purpose of exercitant in undertaking the *Exercises*.

The Priority of Relationships.

As in Augustine's method of catechesis, the effective use of the *Exercises* depends upon the relationship between the exercitant and the director. The director must be aware of how the exercitant is responding to the *Exercises*. For example, in the Seventh Annotation, Ignatius cautions, "If he who is giving the Exercises sees that the one who is receiving them is in desolation and tempted, let him not be hard or dissatisfied with him, but gentle and indulgent, giving him courage and strength for the future. . . ." ⁴⁰ The Seventeenth Annotation indicates that it is important for the exercitant to tell the director what is happening in her life as she practices the *Exercises*. David Fleming comments that the openness between the exercitant and the director helps the director to:

listen, mirror back to us, enlighten, and adapt the progress of the retreat according to the way we are being stirred by God to make our response. Without this openness between ourselves and our director, the retreat itself will not be able to be adapted and focused so as to facilitate the growth possible for us. ⁴¹

The relationship between a discerning director and the exercitant is vital for the most effective use of the *Exercises* for the spiritual growth of the exercitant.

The Transformation of the Church

Ignatius believed that the *Spiritual Exercises* would be a force for the transformation of the church. Ignatius intended that one who received the *Exercises* would go back into the church and influence the church by his or her actions. Undertaking the *Spiritual Exercises* is not primarily for advancing the spiritual growth of the individual for the individual's sake, but is ultimately for the sake of the church. Section 352 and following of the *Exercises* gives guidelines for how "To Have the True Sentiment Which We Ought to Have in the Church Militant." ⁴² David

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 17.

Fleming observes, in commenting on this section, “St. Ignatius Loyola was convinced that the man or woman who makes the thirty-day Exercises would be taking on a more active and concerned role in the life of the Church.”⁴³ Ideally, those who became more active involved in the church because they had received the *Exercises* would help to transform the church.

Additional Application for the Creation of A Spiritual Growth Process

A statement in *The Constitutions*, a manual written by Ignatius to guide the members of his order, is instructive for use in developing a spiritual-growth process.⁴⁴ *Cons*, [649]⁴⁵, states that:

*The Spiritual Exercises should not be given in their entirety except to a few persons, namely, those of such a character that from their progress notable fruit is expected for the glory of God.*⁴⁶ *But the exercises of the first week can be made available to large numbers; and some examinations of conscience and methods of prayer (especially the first of those which are touched on in the Exercises) can also be given far more widely; for anyone who has good will seems to be capable of these exercises.*⁴⁷

The topic of the first week of the *Exercises* is how sin and evil hinder our service to and praise of God. William Barry’s interpretation of the purpose of the First Week is that its “focus is on desiring to have a deep experience of how much Jesus loved us even though he knew how sinful we were.”⁴⁸ The *Spiritual Exercises* gives several suggestions for prayers during the First Week. The “first of those

⁴² Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 280.

⁴³ David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 281.

⁴⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 38.

⁴⁵ This style of citation is suggested as the preferable one by Ganss in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 39.

⁴⁶ See *Cons*, [622 (e)], Ignatius, *The Constitutions*, 275, for a definition of who ‘these few persons’ are.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 283. In the text, this entire section is italicized. I am unable to determine if the italics were in the original to indicate a commentator’s note, Ignatius’ note or even something else.

⁴⁸ William A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2001), 42.

touched on in the *Exercises*” is the prayer of examination of conscience, sections 24-26 and 32-43, often called simply the ‘examen.’ This prayer helps the exercitant to learn to pray over the events of the day, “to see where God has been present in my life and where I have kept God out. . . .”⁴⁹ Priest and professor David J. Hassel describes the five parts of the examen: “an act of gratitude for God’s gifts of the day, a request for grace to know one’s sins and to escape from them, a review of the day since one’s previous examen, expression of sorrow for one’s failings, and a request for grace to live the next period of time with more generosity for God and for one’s neighbor.”⁵⁰ In the final chapter, I will suggest the examen as one of the ways of prayer that the new believer may wish to explore and use in her spiritual life “to keep in close contact with Christ throughout the day.”⁵¹

Summary

The *Spiritual Exercises* is the record of the insights of Ignatius of Loyola into the process of his being transformed into the image of Christ. Creativity and the priority of relationships were of crucial importance to both Augustine and Ignatius. Like Augustine’s *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, the *Spiritual Exercises* displays an understanding of the need for a creative approach. Rather than advocating a rote method of teaching, Ignatius understood that the effective presentation of the *Exercises* must be adapted to each individual. Just as Augustine stresses the importance of the relationship between the catechist and the inquirer, Ignatius stresses the importance of the relationship between the director and the exercitant so that the Holy Spirit can work with the greatest effectiveness in the exercitant. Ignatius also understands that the transformation of the believer could become

⁴⁹ David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 33.

⁵⁰ David J. Hassel, *Radical Prayer: Creating a Welcome for God, Ourselves, Other People and the World* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), fn. 7, 140.

⁵¹ Ibid.

a force for affecting and transforming the entire church.

John Wesley's Class Meetings

Introduction

In 1738, John and Charles Wesley began to preach in London. Many individuals asked the Wesleys to give them advice and to pray for them. Although John Wesley did give such help, he soon found "they were too many for me to talk with severally so often as they wanted it."⁵² So he began to meet with a group every Thursday. From these meetings arose the United Society. The 'United Society' was "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the work of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."⁵³

In February 1742, the Society meeting in Bristol, England met to determine how to complete paying for the meetinghouse in Bristol. Wesley reports that:

It was at length agreed, 1. That every member of the Society who was able, should contribute a penny a week. 2. That the whole Society should be divided into little companies or classes, about twelve in each class; and, 3. That one person in each Class should receive the contribution of the rest, and bring it to the Stewards weekly.⁵⁴

It was from this discussion that 'class meetings' were born.⁵⁵

John Wesley conceived of class meetings as a way to keep track of whether those in the Society were behaving correctly:

⁵² The information in this paragraph is found in John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 8: *Addresses, Essays, Letters* (London, Eng.: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprint, Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), 248-250.

⁵³ John Wesley, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:269.

⁵⁴ John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, vol. 1, *Everyman's Library*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London, Eng.: J. M. Dent & Co., n.d.), 1:357, 8.

⁵⁵ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:253.

‘But how should this multitude of people be kept together? And how should it be known whether they walked worthy of their profession?’ They [John and Charles Wesley] were providentially led, when they were thinking on another thing, namely, paying the public debt, to divide all the people into little companies, or classes, according to their places of abode, and appoint one person in each class to see all the rest weekly. By this means it was quickly discovered if any of them lived in any known sin. If they did, they were first admonished; and, when judged incorrigible, excluded from the society.⁵⁶

John and Charles Wesley codified the rules for class meetings in May, 1743 in a document entitled, “The Nature, Design, And General Rules of the United Societies.”⁵⁷ The purpose of the ‘classes’ was to make it easy to discern whether the members were “working out their own salvation.” Wesley sets out three ways to determine if a person was continuing “to evidence their desire of salvation”: prohibitions (“do no harm, avoiding evil of every kind” and naming said evils), exhortations (“doing good” and being merciful), and “attending upon all the ordinances of God,” namely, attending worship, communion, prayer, Bible study, and fasting. Each person was to meet with the leader of the class once a week to be questioned on ‘how their souls prosper’ and to pay their penny if they could afford it. The leaders met once a week to report on their class members and to turn in the money they had collected.

A new member had to enter into a trial period before she could become a part of the Society. A new member was placed in a class convenient to her work schedule and to her home. She would attend the class for an hour a week. The new member

⁵⁶ John Wesley, sermon “On God’s Vineyard,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7: *Sermons* (London, Eng.: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprint, Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), 207.

⁵⁷ “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:269-71.

would be admitted into the Society in the next quarter if no objection were made.⁵⁸
The new believer was then assigned to a class meeting.

Interface with the Six Concepts from the New Science

The Priority of Relationships

Wesley's class meetings were based on relationships. The class meetings were small so that the leader could know each person individually. At the inception of class meetings, the leader of the class meeting met each person in the class in the member's home. Luke Tyerman observes that because the time required for these home meetings proved quite difficult, each leader began meeting with "his apportioned members all together, once a week, at a time and place most convenient for the whole. The leader began and ended each meeting with singing and prayer, and spent about an hour in conversing with those present, one by one."⁵⁹ There was thus a personal relationship between each member of the class and the leader. The leader was to examine the life of each one in her charge to see whether his life showed his faith.⁶⁰ In addition, although the class meetings were not originally meant for fellowship, the members became close to one another as they shared their attempts to live the Christian life. In John Wesley's words, "Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens,' and naturally to 'care for each

⁵⁸ John Wesley, "On God's Vineyard," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7: 209. Tom Albin calls this trial period the "trial band." Tom Albin, "Finding God in Small Groups," interview by Tim Stafford, *Christianity Today* 47, no. 8 (2003): 42.

⁵⁹ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*, Burt Franklin: Research and Works Series: Philosophy & Religious History Monographs 132 (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1872; reprint, New York, NY: Lenox Hill Pub. & Dist. Co. (Burt Franklin), 1973), 1:379.

⁶⁰ Women were leaders of class meetings, not only those composed only of women but also of mixed gender groups. Wellman J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (London, Eng.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 264; D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 97, 8.

other.”⁶¹ Although men and women were segregated in other groups in the Society such as the bands, in class meetings men, women, rich, and poor met together. Through this heterogeneity, members of the class meetings were able to develop close relationships with others with whom they would not otherwise have associated.

Taking the Environment into Account

John Wesley did take into account the environment in which class members were living. Society meetings and class meetings were held where people lived.⁶² Wesley directed that each society be “divided into smaller companies, called *classes*, according to their respective places of abode.”⁶³

He also accommodated the needs of class members who could not attend regular Society meetings. Some of the members of the class meetings were laborers in mines and factories. Because of their work schedules, they were often unable to attend regular Society meetings. Rather than evict them from the Society, Wesley held ‘watchnights’ with these workers. Wesley was “informed that several persons in Kingswood [a coal mining town] frequently met together at the school; and, . . . spent the greater part of the night in prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving.”⁶⁴ Wesley ‘designed to watch with them’ one Friday each month. He preached “between eight and nine; and we continued till a little beyond the noon of night, singing, praying, and praising God.”⁶⁵ Watchnight meetings were also started in other areas.

⁶¹ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:254.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶³ John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:269.

⁶⁴ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:255.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

The Integration of the New Believer into the Local Church

Members of Wesley's class meetings were not set apart from the whole Society, even during their probationary periods. Each member of a class meeting was required to attend the Society's Sunday-evening worship service. In addition to meeting others in worship services, new believers would have fellowship with established Society members at class meetings. Any given class meeting would include not just new believers, but members of the Society in all stages of their Christian faith.⁶⁶

D. Michael Henderson describes Wesley's system as interlocking. The class meeting was one part of a total system, the goal of which was holiness. Henderson describes the system:

The societies proclaimed and explained the doctrine, the class meeting was designed to implement the behavioral quest for holy lifestyle, and the bands facilitated the cultivation of inner purity and the purging of the attitudes. It was an interlocking system, woven around a common theme. *Each component depended on the others*, and working together to accomplish different facets of the stated goal (emphasis added).⁶⁷

New believers were an important component of a whole system and were not set apart from other groups in the church.

The Transformation of the Church

John Wesley conceived of his Society as a way to transform the Church of England as a whole.⁶⁸ Admittedly, this dissertation advocates the necessity of the transformation of the local church, not the transformation of the entire Christian church or any denomination. However, John Wesley's belief in the need to restore

⁶⁶ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 98.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁸ The transformation of the Church of England did not occur. John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleys* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 204, 5.

the Church of England to “the kind of moral and spiritual discipline which Wesley and other parsons aimed at by means of the societies”⁶⁹ is important to note in our discussion of John Wesley’s class meetings. John Wesley adamantly resisted any suggestion of separating from the Church of England. In John Wesley’s sermon “On God’s Vineyards,” Wesley states that he and his brother “have been long pressed to separate from it [the Church of England]; to which they have had temptations of every kind. But they cannot, they dare not, they will not separate from it, while they can remain therein with a clear conscience.”⁷⁰ Wesley had an even higher goal for his Society than merely the transformation of the Church of England: “endeavouring to leaven the whole nation with that ‘faith that worketh by love.’”⁷¹

One-size-fits-all

The process will require creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program. Both Augustine’s catechetical methods and Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* depended for their effectiveness upon tailoring the method used to the learner. John Wesley’s methods were one-size-fits-all. Everyone had to behave in a particular way or be removed from the Society.

While Wesley’s class meetings focused on each individual, the focus seems to have been more with outward actions—behavior—than about inward transformation.⁷² Apparently, Wesley felt that one’s outward behavior showed one’s inward

⁶⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁰ Wesley, “On God’s Vineyard,” *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:208.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² In his letter written in 1748, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” Wesley does say that religion does not consist “merely in externals. . . it is nothing short of, or different from, ‘the mind that was in Christ;’” *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:249. However, in this same letter, Wesley states twice that he directed the leaders of the classes to “make a particular inquiry into the *behaviour* of those whom he saw weekly (emphasis added).” Ibid., 252, 3. Wesley focused on the outward behavior of the members of the Society.

transformation. However, his emphasis seems to have been less on the inward and more on creating a certain type of individual—one who did not behave in ‘improper’ ways. The class meetings, while focused on the individual, seem to have been a one-size-fits-all method of attempting to induce spiritual growth by examining outward conduct. If one wished to become a Christian, one had to join a Society and begin in the class meetings. One had to behave in a certain, ‘proper’ way or be dismissed from the Society. As D. Michael Henderson observes, the class meeting “was a triumph, not of any human personality, but of an ingenious set of instruments designed for behavioral change.”⁷³

John Wesley may have been influenced by a machine view of the world that had developed with the coming of the Industrial Revolution to England. If he thought of his Society as a machine, then each part had to fit properly into the machine. If the part was a misfit, it was out. Wesley maintained absolute control over who could participate in the Society.⁷⁴ After Wesley’s death, the entire system began to break down, leaving only the class meetings. While this breakdown has been attributed to Methodism’s becoming a denomination,⁷⁵ it is likely that the breakdown occurred because of Wesley’s tight control. Wesley’s need to control led to dissatisfaction within the ranks of Wesley’s lay preachers and discord between the ordained and lay preachers.⁷⁶ John Wesley’s ordination of ministers, in his belief that he had the power to do so, caused a strain on the relationship between his societies and the Anglican Church that could not be healed.⁷⁷ Gillian

⁷³ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 93.

⁷⁴ Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (London, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1925), 83. John Kent makes this observation. “Naturally authoritarian, Wesley found in religion a means of imposing his will on some of his contemporaries. . . .” *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, 189.

⁷⁵ David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1991), 55; *Christianity Today*, Tom Albin interview, 44.

⁷⁶ V.H.H. Green, *John Wesley, Leaders of Religion*, ed. C.W. Dugmore (London, Eng.: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), 146, 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

Evans notes that Wesley's insistence on staying within the Church of England "was an uncomfortable and ecclesiologically anomalous situation, and, as it proved, inherently unstable."⁷⁸ As we have seen in discussions above, top-down-control leads to the dysfunction of an organization rather than to its health. The top-down-control wielded by John Wesley nearly led to the demise of the entire structure of the Society system.

Wesley's Society and its groupings seem more analogous to the control center Bill Easum and Tom Bandy describe, whose function is to keep the machine running rather than to facilitate spiritual transformation.⁷⁹ As we have seen, the use of standardized programs by the local church can be a way to maintain control in order to produce a particular kind of church member.⁸⁰ Certainly, John Wesley's intent was to produce conformity to his concept of the properly behaving Christian. A problem with a one-size-fits-all approach is that it may lead to 'proper' outward behavior without effecting inward transformation.

Summary

In the class meetings of John Wesley's Societies, relationships were vital to the spiritual growth that Wesley wanted to see in the Society members. Individual attention in small groups fostered the relationship between the leader and the group member and the relationships among the group members. Through these relationships, each individual could both give and receive useful correction. The new believer was immediately made a part of the Society and of a class meeting rather than isolating him in a separate group. John Wesley believed that the changed behavior of the individual believer would transform the church as a whole. Wesley adjusted

⁷⁸ Gillian Rosemary Evans, *The Church and the churches: Toward an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (New York, NY and Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67.

⁷⁹ William Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, 113.

⁸⁰ See p. 38, above.

the requirements of his system to take into account the environment where the new believer lived and worked.

A problem with Wesley's approach is that it was one-size-fits-all. He wanted to create a specific type of behavior in the member of the Society. The ultimate breakdown of the Society is evidence of the importance of a creative process and the futility of trying to control the work of the Holy Spirit.

Willow Creek Community Church

Introduction

Willow Creek Community Church held its first services in October 1975. A team that had worked together in a youth ministry (called 'Son City') planted the church.⁸¹ The leader of the team, Bill Hybels, had a vision to reach unchurched adults, whom he called 'seekers.' Lynne Hybels writes that the goal of those who founded Willow Creek Community Church "was to reach unchurched adults, lead them to Christ, disciple them, and establish the kind of community of faith we had experienced in Son City."⁸²

Bill Hybels "soon realized that new adult converts would not mature spiritually unless they had a one-on-one relationship with a more mature Christian."⁸³ He began trying to do what John Wesley had done, being the 'more mature Christian' to new adult converts by himself. Over time, Willow Creek developed into a church of small groups. At present, each small group has four to ten members. The basis of small groups is affinity. Age, life stage, interest, ministry, or support can be the focus

⁸¹ The history of Willow Creek Church is taken from Lynne Hybels and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, HarperCollins, 1995).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 65.

of a small group.⁸⁴ In small groups, members identify their spiritual gifts, learn to share Jesus Christ with their friends, and are taught the importance of tithing for their spiritual development.⁸⁵ Through the small-group experience, new believers learn to build relationships with their unchurched friends and bring them to the Sunday-morning seeker service.

New believers begin as ‘positional’ members of the church. Because of their having accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The goal of small groups and of participation in worship with other believers is that these positional members will become ‘participating’ members of the local church.⁸⁶

Interface with the Six Concepts from the New Science

A Creative Process

The Willow Creek model borders on a one-size-fits-all program in which every new believer must participate. In practice, however, Willow Creek does not require that everyone participate in the small-group process. Willow Creek small-group executive director Bill Donahue and his predecessor Russ Robinson include a weak qualification in their book, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*:

We put a high value on group participation at Willow Creek, but we allow a person to become a “participating member” of the church even if the person isn’t yet in a group. We monitor those who are not in a group as they connect with various ministries in the church and then envision and prompt them to move toward formal group life.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry: A Troubleshooting Guide for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 168.

⁸⁵ Lynne Hybels and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church*, 130.

⁸⁶ Bill Hybels, *Defining Success in the Church*, Defining Moments: The Willow Creek Audio Journal for Church Leaders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), cassette.

⁸⁷ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*, 38. However, in a previous book, Donahue and Robinson state categorically that “we put everyone in a small group.”

Although participation in a small group is the norm and not mandated, it is a goal that every believer will eventually join a small group. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson say that when the church was setting out its objectives, “. . . we wanted it to become abnormal for a person not to be in a group.”⁸⁸

John Wesley demanded that a new believer participate in a small group that functioned in the same as every other small group. At Willow Creek the broad range of types of small groups available to the new believer recognizes that one type of group will not fit every person. Affinity is the core of the small-group infrastructure. Donahue and Robinson define affinity as “likenesses (common age, interest, or need), common tasks, or whatever will draw people together.”⁸⁹ They list 110 affinity groups available at Willow Creek.⁹⁰ The many types of small groups enable each individual to join the group that seems to best fit his or her interests, needs, and level of spiritual growth. Individuals may change groups and are expected to do so.⁹¹ While there are small groups for new believers, there is no suggestion that a new believer is automatically required to attend a new believers group.

The Priority of Relationships

The priority of relationships is clearly present in the Willow-Creek model. The intent of Willow Creek’s small groups is to give everyone in the church “the opportunity for transforming relationships.”⁹² Coaches meet with small-group leaders to encourage them.⁹³ Small-group leaders build relationships with the members of their group; the members of the group build relationships with each

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 14.

⁸⁸ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 169-82.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁹² Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, 12.

⁹³ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*, 25.

other and learn to build relationships with those outside the church.

Consideration of the Environment

Willow Creek also takes the environment into consideration in several ways. The places where people live and work are a factor in the small-group process. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson explain, “We have used geographic breakdowns in selected ministries, combining affinity with geography. . . . We have tried to meet people where they sense *they* have need.”⁹⁴

The environment in which the new believer lives and works is also important. In their small group, people learn how to relate as Christians to those in their environment—their unchurched friends and neighbors—and learn how to introduce them to Jesus Christ.

Willow Creek has also considered the environment by noting that some of those who have attended the church have to drive for an hour or more to reach the church building. Willow Creek’s website states: “To be truly effective, the local church needs to be local, so the people you see at church are also the people you see at the grocery store, at school functions, at baseball games.” To that end, three additional campuses have been opened; “Each congregation is an extension of the other.” The description of the congregations explains that attending a local campus of the church is “the perfect way to experience real community with neighbors who are experiencing similar challenges along the road of life.”⁹⁵

Integration of the New Believer into the Local Church

At Willow Creek, new believers immediately become a part of the church,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁵ Willow Creek Community Church, “Regional Congregations.” <<http://www.willowcreek.org/regional/>> (23 February 2005).

participating in New Community, the Wednesday-evening worship service for believers. At this service, the new believer learns to worship and takes communion with other believers.⁹⁶

The Transformation of the Local Church

Willow Creek Community Church is an example of a local church that has created a flexible structure for spiritual formation—small groups. Willow Creek calls itself “a church of small groups”; the intent of small groups at Willow Creek is to “build the church as community.”⁹⁷ It adapts its small groups to the nature of the environment in which its people live and to the interests of its people.

Willow Creek Community Church as a whole has embraced, through careful and extensive study, ‘The Five Gs’ as a way of evaluating the transformation of the believer from a positional member of the Body of Christ into a participating member of the local church.⁹⁸ *Grace* is a “heart change that will manifest itself in new behavior, new attitudes, and new values.” *Growth* is a commitment to growing spiritually. *Group* is the relational component, which includes accountability. *Gifts* is the discovery and use of one’s spiritual gifts for the common good. *Giving* is the “investment of one’s financial resources on a consistent basis.” For the Willow Creek church, the five Gs represent “the Spirit’s activity that generates the transformation that eventually produces the manifestation” of heart change. The church is a partner with the Holy Spirit in the transformation of a new believer.

⁹⁶ Lynne Hybels and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church*, 181.

⁹⁷ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry*, 23.

⁹⁸ Although the five Gs are described in *Rediscovering Church* and *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* (p. 28), the text is taken from the cassette, *Defining Success in the Church*.

When a person feels that she has become a participating member of the church, she goes to her small group leader who talks with her and then, if appropriate, affirms that she is a participating member of the church. The New Community affirms her new status during a worship service. The church as a whole is a part of the process of the transformation of the new believer, sets the standards for becoming a participating member, and affirms and celebrates together that transformation.

Summary

Willow Creek Community Church is a church that has been transformed to become a partner with the Holy Spirit in continuing the process of spiritual transformation that has already started in the new believer. Through a clear ministry vision and the small-group process, the new believer comes into relationship with other believers, learns to relate as a Christian to his unchurched co-workers, friends, and family members, and has a wide choice of small groups in which to participate. Although the bias for everyone to be a part of the small-group system borders on one-size-fits-all, an individual may still be allowed to be a part of the church without participating in a small group.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown how four models the church has used to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers interface with the concepts that we adduced from the new science in chapter four. In addition, we have identified several additional elements to propose in the design of a spiritual-growth process—the use of both the Old and New Testaments and the examen of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The challenge we face in the final chapter is to help a local church to design

a process for the spiritual growth of new believers that will not revert to a one-size-fits-all program. We will meet this challenge by using the six concepts from the new science to suggest elements that a local church can use to design a creative process that will respond to the needs and lives of new believers as they begin their lifetime journey of transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SIX

DESIGNING A PROCESS

The thesis of this dissertation is that concepts from the new science can help a local church create a flexible and adaptable process for facilitating the spiritual growth of new and returning believers. In chapter two, we considered whether the spiritual growth of new Christians is expected and if so, whether spiritual growth is to occur in the church. Having answered both questions in the affirmative, we then looked at the new science and deduced therefrom six concepts that we will use to propose elements to be used in designing the process. In chapter four, we examined four models that the church has used to help new believers grow spiritually. We considered these models in the light of the six concepts set out in chapter four and found several additional ideas that can be incorporated into a spiritual-growth process.

In this chapter, we will begin by considering how working with the church leaders to help them to understand themselves as spiritual leaders rather than as management will begin to transform the church. We will then focus on the importance of avoiding a one-size-fits-all view of new believers by not forcing new believers into a program in which all must participate. We will next discuss the importance of the Gospel story for the new believer and for the local church as a whole: the Gospel story creates relationship among believers and between the believer and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. I will then propose an example of a process that could be used by a local church. I will analyze the example in light of the remaining five concepts from the new science to suggest elements that

a local church might use to design a process to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers.

The goal of the local church in enabling the spiritual growth of new believers is well expressed in Robert Bellah's *The Good Society*, quoting Methodist pastor Robert Cooper: Individuals need to be discipled in the faith “so they won't remain baby Christians, so they can grow in their understanding and give witness in the way they live their lives; and then, having been discipled, they become *apostles* and put into practice Christ's word and love in their home, in their neighborhood, in their job and school.”¹ This goal is the goal of the process for enabling the spiritual growth of new believers.

In Matt. 28:19, Jesus gives his disciples the command that is translated “go and make disciples of all nations.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed, defining μαθητεύσατε as used in this verse, offers “teach” as an alternative translation for “make a disciple of.”² As we noted in chapter three, Donald A. Hagner proposes that the emphasis in this verse is not on proclamation but “on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship.”³ Because ‘making’ connotes manufacturing parts, a less mechanistic translation is preferable—perhaps ‘teach all nations,’ ‘nurture disciples of all nations,’ or ‘disciple all nations.’ A flexible and adaptable process for facilitating the spiritual growth of new believers will not ‘make’ people, but will allow the local church to participate in what God has already begun (2 Cor. 1:21, 22). Therefore, rather than creating a program to ‘make’ a product, a local church will design a process to nurture those who are ‘being made’ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Robert N. Bellah et. al., *The Good Society* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 198.

² BAGD, 2nd ed., s.v. “μαθητεύω.”

³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 887.

What I am proposing will not be ‘simple and reproducible.’ As Bill Easum and Tom Bandy stress in reference to their ideas for helping a local church develop a view of itself as a living organism—a ‘Spiritual Redwood’: “We cannot repeat often enough that the very nature of organic organizations prohibits any detailed description that can simply be replicated in every context with generally predictable results. The Spiritual Redwood is not a machine.”⁴ A flexible and creative process will, of necessity, be fluid and the specifics of the process will vary according to the context in which the process is implemented; the members of the group, the facilitator(s), the place in which the group is held, and the local church involved will contribute to making each process different.

The process that will result from the application of the six concepts from the new science that I have proposed will not only be different for different churches, but will be different each time it is implemented by a church with a group of new believers. The process will be like a snowflake. Although each snowflake is recognizable as a snowflake, each snowflake is unique. As James Gleick notes, in the formation of a snowflake, “sensitive dependence on initial conditions serves not to destroy but to create.” Each snowflake is a one-of-a-kind product of the wind, temperature, humidity, and particles in the air through which the growing snowflake floats.⁵ Economist Irene Van Staveren, in applying chaos theory to institutional economics, affirms Gleick’s observation: “Chaotic systems exhibit sensitive dependence on initial conditions. This path dependence makes change every time unique and not reproducible.”⁶ The dynamics of each group of new believers will be different from the dynamics of other groups of new believers.

I am also making suggestions rather than proposing a program because

⁴ Willaim Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, 114.

⁵ James Gleick, *Chaos*, 311.

⁶ Irene Van Staveren, “Chaos Theory and Institutional Economics: Metaphor or Model?” *Journal of Economic Issues* 33, no. 1 (1999): 151. *Business Source Premier Database*. EBSCOhost (10 July 2002).

the specifics of the process to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers will be dictated by the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of spiritual transformation. It is the Holy Spirit who does the work of transformation in the heart of a person (2 Cor. 3:18). As E. Stanley Ott emphasizes, “It is not the tools of ministry per se but the work of God’s Spirit among us that forms Christ within us.”⁷ This dissertation will not presume to dictate how the Holy Spirit will work in a particular local congregation. The goal is not a product—an individual who ‘fits the system.’ The goal is, rather, for a local church to be partner with the Holy Spirit in enabling the spiritual growth of the new believer. R. Paul Stevens describes ‘spiritual growth’ as “growth in responsiveness and expressiveness of life in the Spirit.”⁸ Who can know the way that the Holy Spirit will move to effect growth in a believer? The local church’s role is to create a climate in which the Holy Spirit *can* move to do the work of transformation.

Sociologist Donald E. Miller describes how what he calls ‘new paradigm churches’ work with the Holy Spirit: “Drawing on their vision of the role of the Holy Spirit, they have transferred authority from the socially constructed institution of the church to a divine presence, who can take them in unpredictable directions.”⁹ Church leaders must work with the Holy Spirit to fashion a process for the spiritual growth of new believers that will be unique for that local church in its community. This process must not be static, but dynamic—able to grow and change. Therefore, church leaders must understand that one of their primary roles is discernment of how

⁷ E. Stanley Ott, *Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, Eng.: Eerdmans, 2002), 47.

⁸ R. Paul Stevens, “Spiritual Growth,” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997): 950.

⁹ Miller continues, “What saves them from the potential chaos, the unpredictability of a ‘spirit-led life’ is their belief in the Bible as an immutable reference point and their conviction that all impulses and ideas should be tested in one’s ongoing relationship to a worshipping community.” Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 155.

the Holy Spirit is leading the church in which they serve. Church consultant Charles M. Olson describes how church boards can learn how to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. He describes the necessary shift in perception required to move a church board from merely making decisions to discernment:

As long as the church adopts the practices of corporate decision making from the cultures of business, management, or politics, we have a pretty clear picture of the process: Get all the information. Consider the options, Know the consequences. Weigh the pros and cons. Reason your way to a conclusion. Communicate with clients, consumers, and colleagues. Debate the merits. Get on with the vote. Secure its implementation. Monitor. Evaluate.

But faith communities march to the beat of a different drummer. What is God calling this congregation to be or do? What is God's will for us now? These decisions are not so easily discussed and managed.¹⁰

Reorienting the vision of church leaders from seeing themselves as managers to seeing themselves as spiritual leaders is crucial to the ideas that proposed here.

The Church Council

We begin at the end. The sixth concept that we have proposed from the new science is that the local church itself must be transformed into a flexible structure that places a priority on the spiritual growth of its members. The transformation of the mind of the church from thinking of itself as merely a social group to understanding itself as a place of spiritual growth and nurture must begin with the church leaders. As Charles Olson observes, "one who holds hope for the renewal of congregational life has to start somewhere. What better place to start than the board and its meetings! If those meetings and relationships are life giving rather than life draining,

¹⁰ Charles M. Olson, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Bethesda, MD.: The Alban Institute, 1995), 87.

the board can become a model of community and ministry for the whole church.”¹¹

Spiritual leaders in the local church model spiritual life for the congregation.

The leadership of the church that I served consists of a council that is elected by those voting members who attend the January annual business meeting. (This meeting is the only regular all-church business meeting held during the year.) The council is composed of a moderator, treasurer, and four other members who chair the standing committees of worship, fellowship and missions, building and grounds, and Christian education. The pastor and youth pastor are ex-officio members of the council. The council meets monthly to hear reports from committees and to transact church business. The educational and work background of the council members represents the congregation as a whole. Many of the adults on the council (and in the church) have served or serve on the boards of secular institutions.

The church council considers itself to be a management group. It functions on what Charles Olson calls the “corporate board model.” He describes this model as ‘reinforced by’ Robert’s Rules of Order and consisting of “coming together, getting down to business, making the decisions, and getting home by 9:30.” Olson contrasts this model with the primary role of the board as ‘prayerful discernment’ of the will of God.¹² The church council has no conception that it is to do more than decide whether to use the Dodge van or determine the rules for the use of the new fellowship hall. As church consultant Herb Miller observes, as church leaders focus on ‘institutional preservation,’ “. . . leaders unconsciously shift their focus from the spiritual to the materialistic. Over a long period of time, the church board loses its vision about the basic purposes of the church.”¹³ The council must regain a vision

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹² Charles M. Olson, “Research: What Makes Church Boards Work? II. Church Boards as Spiritual Leaders,” *Congregations* (July/August 1993): 17.

¹³ Herb Miller, *The Vital Congregation*, Effective Church Series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 97.

of the church as the Body of Christ in the community and of themselves as spiritual leaders. If they are able to do so, they can then begin to discern how the spiritual-growth process for new believers could best function within the church.

How can the church council develop a vision for itself as the spiritual leaders of the congregation? Dallas Willard insists that the leadership of the local congregation “must recognize that the first step in leading the people who are there to become apprentices of Jesus is for the ministering elders and overseers to *be* apprentices of Jesus.”¹⁴ If the council is to come to see itself as a spiritual board, the members of the council must come to see themselves as people who need to grow spiritually. Professor of Spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary, Ben Campbell Johnson and pastor Glenn McDonald agree in describing what they call the ‘Church in the Spirit’—the local church that is controlled by the Holy Spirit. They emphasize that in such a church, both pastors (those for whom ministry is a career path) and lay leaders must have “an intentional, growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Each member of the church council must learn to see himself or herself as a spiritual person whose life is continually in a process of transformation by the Holy Spirit.

The church-council members must embrace the importance of their own spirituality and understand that their spirituality determines how they lead the church. How can the church council overcome complacency and learn to see itself as a spiritual leadership group? Thomas P. Holland, professor and director of the Institute for Nonprofit Organizations at the University of Georgia, states, “Board development cannot be imposed on its members . . . For change to take place, the group must be ready for it and accept the importance of improving its work.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 244.

¹⁵ Ben Campbell Johnson and Glenn McDonald, *Imagining a Church in the Spirit: A Task for Mainline Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, Eng.: Eerdmans, 1999), 118.

¹⁶ Thomas P. Holland, “Developing a More Effective Board,” in *Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations: A Handbook for Trustees, Presidents, and Church Leaders*, ed. Thomas

Peter A. C. Smith, in discussing the importance of the principles of chaos and complexity for businesses, echoes this point. He says, "It must be borne in mind that new patterns have to emerge, they cannot be imposed; this is achieved as long as the managers and employees themselves help to create the conditions under which the new context can emerge."¹⁷ However, it does not seem productive to wait for an epiphany to happen to the council members. At the risk of imposing changes upon the council members, one needs to begin somewhere.

The area of relationships could be the beginning point. Former president of Fuller Theological Seminary David Hubbard, in answering the question, "How do you coach people to view the board as a ministry rather than an obligation?" answers that he would "start by improving the spiritual and intellectual relationship among board members."¹⁸ The process of working with the church council could begin by building the relationships among the council members. Monthly meetings could be held on a Saturday morning and include breakfast, study, and prayer. David Hubbard gives a good solution to the problem of attendance. Just start with whomever is willing to attend.¹⁹ A weekend retreat for the purpose of spiritual growth could also be implemented.²⁰

A goal for holding the council breakfasts could be the goal set out by David Hubbard: "Help them see the board, not as the way the church does its business, but as the model of the church in prayer, study, and service."²¹ One could begin with study of Biblical leaders such as Abraham, David, Solomon, Deborah. The group

P. Holland and David C. Hester (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 89.

¹⁷ Peter A. C. Smith, "Implications of Complexity and Chaos Theories for Organizations that Learn," *The Learning Organization* 10 (2003): 322.

¹⁸ David Hubbard and Sam Reeves, "Bringing Out the Best in Your Board: An Interview with David Hubbard and Sam Reeves," *Leadership* 15, no. 1 (1994): 95.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The council has never, to my knowledge, had a retreat. Charles Olson recommends "an occasional officer's retreat for Bible reading only, supplemented by worship and solitude." *Transforming Church Boards*, 146.

²¹ David Hubbard interview, 95.

could also examine times when the church had to discern God's will (for example, Acts 8) with a focus on how the leader or leaders discerned (or neglected to discern or to follow) God's direction. A discussion and study of who the Holy Spirit is and what the church is would also be helpful. Spiritual disciplines can be studied and practiced, perhaps by using Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* or Marjorie Thompson's *Soul Feast*.²² Each member of the group will be helped to discern his or her spiritual gifts. An important part of the Saturday meetings would be prayer, particularly for each other.²³ It is hoped that in time the Saturday meetings would become expected for new council members. Ideally, the Saturday meetings would result in the expectation of spiritual growth that would come as a part of service on the council.

The long-term goal is for church council to develop a vision for the church in which the spiritual growth of each person is seen as vital. This long-term vision will strive to create a climate in the church that Dallas Willard has envisioned, in which the goal for the spiritual growth of each person is that they learn to be like Jesus.²⁴ The need for all believers to grow spiritually in the local-church community must become embedded in the culture of the church like a stent placed in an artery. The stent becomes a part of the artery as the endothelium of the artery grows around and engulfs the stent. A spiritual board will help to establish a church culture in which spiritual growth is expected of each person.

The long-term nature of the process of helping the council to see itself as a spiritual board cannot be overestimated. Bill Easum calls for "a twenty year view" in an unhealthy church.²⁵ Dan Southerland stresses the need to "go slow, go slow,

²² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988); Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, foreword by Henri J. M. Nouwen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

²³ While I would encourage the sharing of faith stories as suggested by Charles Olson, I would be reluctant to share church history stories. In the present life of the church, remembering 'the old days' tends to be more regressive than helpful.

²⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 241, 2.

²⁵ Bill Easum, "Disciple Making Leaders," <<http://www.easumbandy.com/netresul/Easum/>> (July 31, 2002), 3. He also suggests 'infiltrating' spiritually mature people onto the board. This strategy would

go slow” when implementing a transition in the church.²⁶

The purpose of helping the council to become a spiritual group that will learn to discern God’s will instead of just making business decisions is ultimately to transform the entire congregation.²⁷ In Charles Olson’s vision, every member of every church board in America would be “transformed by the indwelling Spirit. Picture meetings inspired by the Spirit that in turn provide inspiration for the whole church!”²⁸ The transformation of church-council members will initiate and inspire the transformation of the whole local church.

Ultimately, the council would discern and design (and redesign when necessary) the process for spiritual growth—not for control, but for transformation. As the council is learning to make decisions together as spiritual leaders and to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit, new believers will (it is hoped) be a part of the local church. These new believers need to begin their spiritual growth in a positive and healthy way. In the following section, I will address the importance of the local church’s perception of new believers as a part of the congregation regardless of a new believer’s level of participation in the local church.

The New Believer

The local church must integrate new believers into the church immediately rather than isolating them from the rest of the congregation. There can be a tendency for a local church to isolate new believers until they ‘prove themselves’ by becoming church members and participating in church activities and programs.

not work at the church I served because the pastor is not allowed to participate in the work of the nominating committee.

²⁶ Dan Southerland, *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 106-109.

²⁷ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 150.

²⁸ Charles M. Olson, *Transforming Church Boards*, 43.

Creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program will be required. The temptation is to require every new believer to participate in the same program (as we have seen in John Wesley's class meetings and in the small group structure of Willow Creek Community Church) Those who do not choose to participate are continually 'encouraged' to become a part of the program. In order to keep the proposed process for the spiritual growth of new believers in the local church from being or becoming one-size-fits-all, the church must recognize and value the fact that not all people who come into the church building will want to participate in the process. Some people may come to the church to participate in a particular ministry such as a grief ministry, a singles' fellowship, or a mothers-and-toddlers group. Some people may want to come only to worship services. Joseph R. Myers calls the desire to be a part of the church's public ministry "public spatial belonging." He says local churches tend to "validate only those ways in which we want people to participate. . . ." It is simply not true that people who belong only in public space are 'on the fringe.' Nor is it true that we somehow need to get them to move 'closer' to get them to be committed."²⁹

Two important points present themselves here. Worship services in the local church must be inviting, places where people can "join in, share what they have, and take a piece of what those around have to give." Doug Pagitt makes this insight in describing the of which church he is the pastor, the Solomon's Porch Community in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Pagitt describes his congregation as "a gathering of people who are on a pilgrimage through life with each other and with God. Our gatherings for worship are designed to help us along on that journey."³⁰ The importance of worship for spiritual growth must not be underestimated.

²⁹ Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 43.

³⁰ Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 51.

In addition, the local church must learn to see those who come only to ministry groups or worship services as a part of the church rather than ‘them’ or ‘those people who won’t participate’ and not push for ‘more commitment.’ A part of the spiritual growth process must be to keep the door open rather than to insist upon anyone going through the door. Ways of keeping the door open can include announcements of available groups or classes, the pastor making himself available after worship, or invitations from members of the congregation for dinner or social events. Certainly, any request for further information, classes, or visits should be an occasion to let people know about spiritual-growth opportunities.

The Story

In a process for facilitating the spiritual growth of new believers, relationships must be a priority. As Leonard Sweet points out, it is only in the believer’s relationship with God’s story that the believer can have a relationship with God out of which flows one’s life. Believers have a relationship with the story, the story of God’s relationship with “God’s creation and creatures.” Believers have a relationship with God through the story.³¹ Believers have a relationship with each other through their participation in the story.

One problem that often arises is that many new believers have little or no knowledge of the story that forms the basis for the belief of the Christian church.³² Therefore, a vital component of providing opportunities for new and returning believers to grow spiritually is the teaching of the Gospel story. The story is the work of God in Jesus Christ as it has been given to us in the Bible.

³¹ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question—Into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the GodLife Relationship* (Colorado Springs, CO: Random House, WaterBrook Press, 2004), 74, 5.

³² I have found a common agreement among those raised as Catholics that, in the Catholic church, neither children nor adults study the Scripture. As a result, adults who have been raised as Catholics and are new to the Protestant church are likely to be beginners in Bible study.

The church exists because Jesus Christ, the One through whom all creation will be redeemed (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:19-21), has called it into being. Therefore, the story includes the Old Testament—creation, the fall, God’s choosing His people and their penchant for turning away from God to worship idols—as well as the New Testament. Without understanding the story, the church, both universal and local, has no understanding of itself, no roots. The danger of a church without roots is that it will be at the mercy of the winds of the culture that blow around it. Professor John Westerhoff warns, “The culture calls upon its religious institutions to bless the status quo, and it calls upon religion’s educational institutions to nurture persons into an acceptance of life as it is. But God calls his/her people to be signs of Shalom, the vanguard of God’s kingdom, a community of cultural change.”³³ The teaching and preaching of the Gospel story can help the church to maintain its roots in Christ rather than being “blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (Eph. 4:14) or by the pressures of society.

The story also provides the individual believer with roots in Christ. Walter Wangerin points out that without experiencing Christ in the Gospel story, believers will not experience the presence and love of Christ. They will, instead, create a sentimental and diminished God out of their own experience.³⁴ In helping new believers learn the story as transmitted to us in the Bible, the church is not teaching mere past events. New Testament scholar Eduard Schweizer concurs with Wangerin. Schweizer points out that in the events of the story we experience the love of God for us: “Faith is not simply belief that such and such events really took place, . . . Faith includes the wholeness of a life which is changed by the love expressed in these events, in Jesus Christ, and accompanying the believer day by day, in the Holy Spirit.”³⁵ In teaching

³³ John H. Westerhoff III, “The Challenge: Understanding the Problem of Faithfulness,” in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. John H. Westerhoff III and O. C. Edwards, Jr. (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1981), 7.

³⁴ Walter Wangerin, Jr. “Making Disciples by Sacred Story,” *Christianity Today* 48, no. 2 (2004): 68.

³⁵ Eduard Schweizer, *The Church as the Body of Christ*, 71.

the story, the church is enabling both believers and itself to live 'the wholeness of a life which is changed by love.'

Teaching the story thus includes teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit, the one who walks alongside us as we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. One of the results of the process a local church can implement is that new believers will be enabled to respond to life's crises from the position of spiritual maturity, not merely react to events. Richard Foster affirms the importance of remembering "that throughout your journey, you have the assurance of a Divine Guide, the Holy Spirit, who will be your faithful companion and counselor through every experience along the way."³⁶ As they begin their spiritual journey, new believers need to be assured of the hope that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in every experience of their lives (John 14:16,17; 23).

The story helps each believer to wrestle with the ubiquitous question, 'Who am I?' Learning the story as an experience of Jesus Christ leads an individual to go beyond head knowledge to a heart knowledge of who he or she is as a child of God. Stan Grenz affirms that in transmitting the salvation story, in "word and deed," the church "mediates to the believer the framework for the formation of personal identity, values and world-view."³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer concurs, stressing that the believer needs the Christian community to speak God's Word to him.³⁸ In the dynamic interplay between individual and community, the new believer experiences the Gospel story as a part of the transformation of her life by the Holy Spirit.

The teaching and preaching of the story also helps the church wrestle with

³⁶ Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A Yanni, *Celebrating the Disciplines: A Journal Workbook to Accompany Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, 1992), xii.

³⁷ Stanley Grenz, "The Community of God: A Vision of the Church in the Postmodern Age," *Crux* 28, no. 2 (1992): 21.

³⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 22, 3.

the question, 'Who are we?' and to learn to see itself and to act as the people of God. The understanding that it is the people of God will help the local church in its ministry to new believers. Stan Grenz points out the importance of the story for the church: "We study the Scriptures in order to discern what it means to be the community of faith and hence what it means to be the community of God today."³⁹ All too often, people attend a church for the same reason that they would join any club—to find community with like-minded people. The church becomes, then, not a place in which to live out the salvation story, a place in which the world sees and experiences the truth of Jesus Christ, but merely a group of like-minded people, no different from any other community group or club. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon emphasize the importance of a local church's living out the truth of the Gospel story:

The Christian claim is not that we as individuals should be based in a community because life is better lived together rather than alone. The Christian claim is that life is better lived in the church because the church, according to our story, just happens to be *true*. The church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Only on the basis of his story, which reveals to us who we are and what has happened in the world, is true community possible.⁴⁰

The new science is a study of connections—the connections between quanta, the connections that make up the whole rather than a study of parts, the connection between an organism and its environment. The Gospel story connects. The Gospel story connects believers to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit, connects believers to one another and to the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) beginning with *adam*. The Gospel story connects the church to the world around it while maintaining and witnessing to the integrity of the truth of Jesus Christ. The Gospel story is an integral part of a process to help the new believer to grow spiritually.

³⁹ Stanley Grenz, "The Community of God," 21.

⁴⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, 77.

An Example of a Process

The following section is an example of a spiritual-growth process. After presenting the example, I will analyze it in light of the remaining five concepts from the new science to suggest elements that a local church might use to design its own process to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers.

It is important to consider using the once-a-month Saturday morning meetings and periodic retreats to help church leaders learn to become a spiritual group whose function is to discern the will of the Holy Spirit. As the church leaders come to understand and to embrace their role as spiritual leaders, they will be able, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to adjust the process to fit the vision given by the Holy Spirit for the spiritual growth of the entire congregation.

As a beginning, twice a year, a group would be formed. Each new group will include those who have approached the pastor or other church members regarding baptism or church membership as well as those who might come forward after an announcement of the forming of a group. Each new believer will be paired with a 'learning partner,' a member of the congregation who will attend the group with the new believer.

In the absence of a qualified layperson, and until training could be developed for lay leadership of the group, the pastor or pastoral-staff member might best facilitate the group.⁴¹ The group (new believers and learning partners) would begin by meeting once a week to learn the story. (At the first meeting, the group members will choose the day and time to meet.) During the first meeting, the members of the group would tell their stories and be given the chance to raise any questions they have, including questions about the Christian faith, doctrine, baptism, and the Bible.

⁴¹ A 'qualified layperson' would be one who is spiritually mature and is able to lead small groups in the manner that we propose.

All members of the group would be given an inexpensive copy of a Bible to use during the class if they do not have one. One of the Gospels would be used as the 'curriculum.' To integrate Augustine's teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments into the group's discussion, the reading and discussion of the Gospel of Matthew with its references to the prophets would be appropriate. Each week the group would read or listen to a recording of a chapter of the Gospel and discuss it. Some time during each meeting can be devoted to discussing the questions raised by the members of the group.

The facilitator of the group will need to be especially sensitive to the backgrounds and questions of the members of the group as she prepares for each group meeting. Dallas Willard, in *The Divine Conspiracy*, describes the environment of the meetings of the group:

We then listen prayerfully to those we teach. We encourage every question, and we make it clear that dealing honestly with the questions that come up is the only path to a robust and healthy faith. We will *never* "pooh-pooh" difficulties, or take any problem with anything less than utter seriousness, or direct the slightest reproach or shame on anyone for having questions and doubts. When we don't honestly know what to say at the time, we will just say so. We will go away and find an answer through study, conversation and prayer.⁴²

This group of new believers would, most likely, include serious seekers. Therefore, after the group completes the study of the Gospel, an opportunity can be given for baptism of any group members who wish to be baptized. If any group members are baptized, this would be an excellent opportunity to discuss the meaning of baptism.

Next, spiritual-growth skills can be introduced. The purpose of introducing these skills is to help new believers to develop a close and healthy relationship

⁴² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, HarperCollins, 1998), 328.

with Jesus Christ in their daily lives and to maintain that relationship in times of crisis or difficulty. The group itself will model one of the important skills. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes, “the physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”⁴³ The importance of sharing experiences, insights, and questions with other believers in an accepting environment is a vital part of spiritual growth and spiritual survival in difficult times. Brian McLaren observes, “The spirituality itself is communal. True, the ‘done in secret’ part is important, but what we experience with God in secret must be brought to the community and shared like a common meal. So we read the Bible as a community, always listening for the insights and input of others.”⁴⁴ Doug Pagitt also emphasizes the importance of community in his description of dialogue: one becomes “a member of a community who is being formed on the spot by the God-given insights of others, in short, a member of a dialogue.”⁴⁵

‘Church’ becomes a nurturing, spiritually supportive community formed and sustained by Jesus Christ rather than something one attends for an hour on Sunday. Other spiritual-growth skills will be introduced depending on the temperament, background, and interests of the group members. The group (new believers and their learning partners) will be introduced to various aspects of the practice of the Christian faith. Topics would include worship, prayer, studying the Bible, stewardship, and experiencing God in nature.⁴⁶ Depending upon the interests of

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 18.

⁴⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 155.

⁴⁵ Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 89.

⁴⁶ This topic would be especially crucial in the geographic area in which the church I served is located. Because of the many opportunities for recreation and the scenic beauty in Montana, many people confuse worship of God as revealed in creation with worship of creation itself. The understanding that one can find a spiritual connection with God in nature must be considered not only important but essential. Gary Thomas discusses this aspect of spirituality in *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 39-58. Thomas discusses temptations inherent in too much focus on nature. This warning is also given by Wayne Simsic in *Natural Prayer: Encountering God in Nature* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1981), 63.

the group members, other topics could include working with the examen of the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*,⁴⁷ the use of the Psalms for encouragement, fasting, retreats, keeping a journal, reading spiritual classics, music, and art. It would be best if the group studied one topic each week and the individual group members practiced that element during the week. At the next meeting, the group members' experiences would be shared and discussed. If one member seemed interested in or suited to a particular spiritual practice, that practice could be shared with him individually.

An important component of the skills introduced to the group would be exploring spiritual disciplines (some of which were mentioned in the paragraph above) together. As Richard Foster writes, "the Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us."⁴⁸ If the local church is to be a partner with the Holy Spirit in the process of the spiritual transformation of a new believer, exploring the spiritual disciplines will give a new believer the means to place himself before God to be transformed.

Dallas Willard points out that individuals, while desiring to learn the disciplines, "are unable to practice such disciplines to much good effect, because they do not have a sense of how such practices fit into the overall process of spiritual formation in Christ."⁴⁹ Every effort would be made to help the members of the group understand, not just the mechanics of the discipline, but its 'fit' into the process of spiritual transformation. The 'teaching' of the disciplines would include learning about the discipline, practicing it, and then coming together with the whole group to discuss the experience. The new believer and her learning partner would be encouraged to work together in practicing and reflecting on the experience of practicing the discipline. Church members who are experienced

⁴⁷ Margaret Silf gives a model for the examen in *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1999), 59-61.

⁴⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

⁴⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 93.

in the various areas could be teachers. This phase of the group experience could be opened up to the whole church by inviting others in the church to join the group.

A resource that would be very valuable to use would be Gary Thomas' *Sacred Pathways*. Thomas' book assumes that not everyone has the same 'path to God,' the same way of relating to God, and experiencing God. Thomas makes clear that the benefit of knowing one's spiritual temperament is not "spiritual self-absorption," but the ability "to feed our souls so we can know God in a new way, love him with every cell of our being, and then express that love by reaching out to others."⁵⁰ Each person will find that different ways of relating to God are necessary or more helpful at different times in his life. Thomas sets out nine pathways that the facilitator could use to help each group member to identify which pathway (or pathways) seems to be the best 'fit' for him. The new believer and his learning partner would be requested to use the checklist at the end of every chapter to discover what their spiritual temperament might be. They would be requested to meet to share their insights or and may choose to do the checklists together. The insights of the group members can be shared in a group meeting. The insights gained from this experience could help the facilitator determine which spiritual disciplines to share with the group.

At some point in the process, an element of service could be introduced. On the basis of his research, Donald E. Miller finds that serving others gives "a sense of worth within a community. . . . They see themselves as participating in a 'vision' to make this a better world. In helping others they appear to be healing themselves as well as gaining a sense of significance. . . ."⁵¹ Brad Kallenberg illustrates the importance of service by telling about new believer 'Allen's' involvement in a poverty-simulation weekend. Kallenberg says that "the poverty simulation weekend forced

⁵⁰ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 34.

⁵¹ Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 164.

Allen to see with the eyes of those who inhabit the only economic class that Jesus called 'blessed' (Luke 6:20). . . . Allen found himself taking his place among those who are being the hands and feet of Jesus through their service to the local poor."⁵² The element of service and sharing the experience of service with the group would be another step in facilitating spiritual maturity and understanding. If and when to introduce a service component would be dependent on the group and the facilitator's feeling about the appropriate time for the group to engage in service. What this service would include would vary from group to group, perhaps serving dinners at the local Poverello Center or working for a day on a Habitat for Humanity build.⁵³ Several group members or a new believer and her learning partner could be involved in service together and share their experiences with the group.

The group would then have a weekend or three-evening class exploring spiritual gifts, again open to the entire church. After the spiritual-gifts class, the group members would meet individually with the facilitator who would help each person to choose a ministry of the church in which to become involved or to assist in developing a new ministry for and with the church (perhaps introducing the new believer to someone in the church with similar interests).

The experience of the group would culminate with a closing celebration. Jean Vanier stresses the importance of celebration: "Celebration is a communal experience of joy, a song of thanksgiving. We celebrate the fact of being together; we give thanks for the gifts we have been given. Celebration nourishes us, restores hope, and brings us the strength to live with the suffering and difficulties of every-

⁵² Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Baker Book House, 2002), 102.

⁵³ The Poverello Center is a non-profit center in Missoula that feeds and houses the homeless.

day life.⁵⁴ During the time of celebration group members would share the ministry they have identified as their next step. This time of celebration could include a meal, communion, and a prayerful 'sending out' of each group member.

Periodic follow-ups by the facilitator should be undertaken both to evaluate and to adjust the process and to provide encouragement, assistance, and celebration. The group should try to meet at least twice for the first year to assess their experiences after leaving the group. The facilitator can meet with each individual in the group (by phone or a personal contact) between the two group meetings to provide additional help or resources. Questions raised would be discussed in the group as a whole.

The end result of the group process is the release of the new believer into ministry. Initially, it may be difficult to find a ministry for a new believer. In the ideal local church, after the new believers learn the story, receive some skills for spiritual growth and discover their spiritual gifts, they would have many opportunities to use their spiritual gifts. Many different small groups, ministry groups, and ministry opportunities would exist in which people could be involved and continue to grow spiritually. However, for the present, one must deal with the reality of the local church as it is and introduce new believers into existing ministry groups or begin new ministries based upon the new believer's gifts and interests.

Giving new and returning believers the opportunity to learn the story in an atmosphere of acceptance of their own questions and backgrounds, in Christian community, introducing spiritual skills to help them to continue to grow spiritually in their day-to-day lives, helping them to identify their spiritual gifts and use and develop those gifts, will be essential to the transformation of the new believers into 'fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.' By providing new believers with ways to

⁵⁴ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, NY and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 313.

channel their desire to grow spiritually, the church becomes a partner with the Holy Spirit in the spiritual growth and the spiritual transformation of new believers.

Concepts from the New Science

1. A Recognition that the Life of the Believer Is Not a Linear Process.

In the 'old science,' the world was a machine that moved forward in a predictable way. In the new science, the world is not a predictable, linear machine. The only predictability of the new science is that it is unpredictable. So are our lives.

As we have noted previously, the Holy Spirit, not programs of human design, controls the spiritual growth of new believers. The local church that sees itself as an organism rather than as a machine will work with the Holy Spirit by creating a climate in which the Holy Spirit can transform new believers.⁵⁵ No human being can know the path on which the Holy Spirit will lead an individual. The spiritual growth of an individual believer does not proceed in predictable, linear stages. It is an inherently dynamic process, a process that must be undertaken in the dynamic, living church.

While our physical lives begin with birth and end with death, the sequence of our life events cannot be reliably plotted or planned. In chapter four we saw that it cannot be assumed that a new believer is in a certain life stage because of his age. It is likely to be unproductive to create programs that teach responses to life events that may never occur in an individual's life. I suggested that a flexible and adaptable process for spiritual growth could equip new believers to respond to what does happen in their lives in a way that would enable them to act from a position of spiritual maturity instead of merely reacting to the events. The

⁵⁵ Bill Easum and Tom Bandy contrast 'church as machine' with characteristics of 'church as organism.' William Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, 123-130.

process would help to transform a new believer from a reactor to a 'self-organizing believer.' Just as the human body, a 'self-organizing system,' can regenerate bone, nerves and blood vessels after injury so the new believer can learn to heal psychological or emotional injury through her relationship with God and the Christian community and her spiritual coping skills.⁵⁶

My first idea was to create a 'toolbox' of spiritual tools new believers could utilize in their healing so that they can meet life problems from a position of spiritual health. However, tools connote a Newtonian, 'old science,' view. Tools fix machines or make the parts of a machine or structure. Instead of a toolbox, the process would introduce new believers to 'spiritual-coping skills'—ways in which they can continue to grow spiritually throughout their lives.⁵⁷ Among the spiritual-coping skills used in the example are experiencing the Gospel story and sharing in Christian community. The example also suggested the skills of worship, prayer, studying the Bible, stewardship, experiencing God in nature, the examen of the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the use of the Psalms for encouragement, fasting, retreats, keeping a journal, reading spiritual classics, music, and art. The specific skills that would be explored will depend upon the interests and temperament of the new believers who are involved.

2. Creativity rather than a one-size-fits-all program will be required.

We have seen that, in nature, new life is essential for growth, health, creativity, stability, and the continuation of life. The imposition of hierarchical control leads to stagnation and even death. The new science helps us to understand that one-

⁵⁶ Time-Life Books, *Repair and Renewal: Journey Through the Mind and Body*, Time-Life Books series, ed. Robert Somerville (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1994), 64, 77, 82, 105.

⁵⁷ These skills could be called a spiritual 'skill set.'

size-fits-all programs designed to facilitate spiritual growth lead to conformity, not growth, and leave out those for whom the program does not fit.

Instead of trying to impose control to inhibit any potentially threatening variables (such as new believers), the church needs to become a partner with the Holy Spirit in creating a climate for the spiritual transformation of new believers. A process, not a program that is “neat and well organized and repeatable,” at least in the same way each time, can best create such a climate.⁵⁸ The nature of each ‘teaching event’ will depend on those who participate in it. The example uses a group approach. A local church may prefer to use a one-to-one mentoring rather than a group. If a group each used, each group, of whatever size, will include individuals with different backgrounds and different ways of relating to each other. Different questions will arise in each group. Group members in each group will have different areas of interest. Some groups will be composed of young mothers and fathers and some will include young, middle-aged, and older members. It is crucial that the facilitator of a group take into account the individual character of each group.

The process of a local church’s participation with the Holy Spirit in the spiritual transformation of the new believer needs to be able to ‘let itself happen’ in the context of the relationships that make up each group. The process is analogous to the self-organizing system described by Erich Jantsch, a pioneer in complexity theory. Jantsch observes that in a biological system that is ‘process-oriented,’ the emphasis is not on being but on becoming (“and even the being appears in dynamic systems as an aspect of becoming”). A process-oriented system is a set of “evolving, interactive processes.”⁵⁹ A flexible process for facilitating the spiritual growth of

⁵⁸ Nancy Kress, *Probability Sun* (New York, NY: Tom Doherty Associates, 2001), 213.

⁵⁹ Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe: Scientific and Human Implications of the Emerging Paradigm of Evolution*, Systems Science and World Order Library, ed. Ervin Laszlo (Oxford, Eng.: Pergamon Press, 1980), 6.

new believers will in practice be 'coherent, evolving, and interactive.' It will have a form, but that form will not be static.

The process is not to be presented in workbook style. The use of books, workbooks, or videos may be a part of an individual group process, but will not be mandated for every group. The only book that every group member needs to have is a Bible. Each new believer will be given a Bible if he does not have one or if he wishes to receive one.⁶⁰ The issue of the existence of different versions and translations of the Bible will arise and should be considered as the subject arises.⁶¹

3. A Priority Must Be Placed on Relationships.

In the new science, the property of a quantum (whether particle or wave) can only be known by its relationship with other quanta. Relationships in the process for enabling the spiritual growth of new believers in the local church are likewise crucial.

The role of spiritual mentor or spiritual guide is without question an important one. However, how many trained spiritual mentors are there in a given local church? This dissertation is an attempt to suggest elements of a process that can be used in any local church with its existing resources. If a local church uses a one-to-one mentoring approach, trained mentors or mature spiritual individuals should be paired with new believers. In a group, a way of providing relationships with others in the congregation would be to pair each new believer with a learning partner, as was shown in the example. The learning partner would attend the group sessions with the new believer. The new believer and his learning partner might meet outside the group to read the Scripture for the next week or to talk about the last week's lesson, if they wished. The learning partner will be encouraged to introduce the new believer to others in

⁶⁰ Inexpensive paperback Bibles in most translations can be obtained through the International Bible Society.

⁶¹ Individuals can and will begin to explore different versions and translations of the Bible as they progress in study. This exploration should be encouraged.

the church. As the local church is developing the process, there will need to be observation and feedback from the new believers and the learning partners to ascertain whether the learning partner was a helpful part of the process. Initially, the facilitator of the group can evaluate the process, but the council (or a group of spiritually mature persons) would eventually do the evaluation after the council has reached the stage of spiritual discernment.

Who will choose the learning partners and on what basis? Perhaps the logical person to be a learning partner for a new believer is 'the one that brought him,' the person who invited the new believer to the local church or who introduced the new believer to Jesus Christ.⁶² However, that person may be unwilling, unsuitable, or unable to be a learning partner. Perhaps the pastor or a member of the congregation with the spiritual maturity to do so, could identify people within the congregation who would be suitable to be learning partners. Bible-study group leaders may suggest names. The new believer may have established a relationship with a church member who he would like to have as a learning partner. After the group concludes, some of the learning partners might be interested in being trained as spiritual mentors.

Another aspect of the development of relationships is the method of 'teaching' the Gospel story. It is important to take the advice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote that spiritual love does not try to influence others by interfering in the life of another. Spiritual love "will rather meet the other person with the clear Word of God and be ready to leave him alone with this Word . . . that Christ may deal with him."⁶³ In the group process, rather than having the facilitator of the group take the position

⁶² In chapter five, it was noted that Augustine's preferred method of questioning a seeker's motives was to ask 'the person that brought him' for teaching. Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, 25.

⁶³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

of a 'guru' who has all the answers, I propose that the group interact with dialogue, similar to that used by the Solomon's Porch Community. Doug Pagitt describes the method he uses as "a spirituality of dialog within communities where the goal is not acquiring knowledge, but spurring one another on to new ways of imagining and learning."⁶⁴ The facilitator directs the dialogue as group members read the story together and discuss their questions, their insights, and the passage's implications for their lives. An environment of openness is essential to this process. Individuals need to know that their questions are important and will be treated seriously.

Relationships will develop between the new believer and her mentor or learning partner, among the small group of new believers and learning partners, and with the facilitator of the group. The learning partner would be the ideal interface between the new believer and the existing church members, perhaps introducing the new believer to church groups. An invitation will be given to church members to participate in some of the learning activities. Those who participated would come to know the new believers as they shared with them in the group.

We are not spelling out every detail in the use of learning partners and the development of relationships among group members. Until a particular church under the discernment of spiritual leaders (the governing board functioning as a spiritual group or a group of mature believers designated for that purpose), determines the direction of the Holy Spirit for the process for enabling the spiritual growth of new believers in *that* church, I can only suggest possibilities. Even after designing a process, the local church must hold the process loosely and not make it into a program. The process will always be about potentiality, not certainty.

⁶⁴ Doug Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 32.

4. The local church must take into account the environment in which it exists and the new believer lives.

In the new science, living systems are open systems that interact with the world around them. We have seen that the local church functions as an open system. Therefore, a local church must see itself as a part of the community in which it is located. The new believer is not an isolated entity, and neither is the local church.

The places in which the new believers live and work will be important in establishing relationships with other new believers and with other members of the congregation. The new believers in the group may live in different neighborhoods, different school districts, and even different towns. The facilitator of the group will need to be aware of where individuals in the group live and where they work, play, and socialize. Church members who are neighbors, whose children attend the same schools, who work at the same school or hospital, and who share common interests, can be encouraged to contact the new believers.

The new believer is a part of the environment outside the believing community and will feel the tension between her new life in Christ and her life in the world. How is the new believer to interact with non-Christian family members, friends and co-workers? A process for the spiritual growth of new believers must help new believers to understand, to deal with, and even to maintain these tensions between life in the world and their new beliefs. The mentor of an individual or the facilitator of a group should explore the problems the new believer is having with non-Christian friends and co-workers (although those issues tend to come up spontaneously). The new believer may have issues within her workplace with rules forbidding the wearing of religious jewelry, playing Christian music in her cubicle, or talking about religious subjects. Questions will also arise from the new believer's exposure to non-Christian influences present in the area (such as Mormons, Wicca, or the occult). These are important areas for group members to explore together.

The environment may influence the location of a group meeting. We saw that geographic locality is involved in the formation of some of the small groups at Willow Creek Community Church. The group may meet close to the places where the individuals in the group live.

5. Integrate new believers into the church immediately rather than isolating them from the rest of the congregation.

A part of the process will be the assimilation of the new believer into the local church as soon as possible. Randy Frazee, in *The Connecting Church*, speaks of the need to separate 'assimilation' from 'spiritual formation.'⁶⁵ Why? As the local church partners with the Holy Spirit in the process of the transformation of an individual into the likeness of Jesus Christ, there must also be assimilation. As in the early church (Acts 2:41-42), the church and the catechumens, John Wesley's class meetings, and Willow Creek Community Church, the new believer must become a part of the local church body *while* he or she is learning to follow Jesus Christ. Brad Kallenberg affirms the importance for the new believer of learning "Christian conceptual language" by "a combination of immersion into the life of the believing community and by formal instruction of catechesis."⁶⁶

The example set out begins with a group meeting of those who want to learn more about the Christian faith.⁶⁷ This first meeting will be a process of building relationships as each person shares his background, spiritual journey, and his questions about the Gospel story and the interface between Christian life and life in the world. Because, as Bonhoeffer points out, "God has bound us together in

⁶⁵ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 67.

⁶⁶ Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 91.

⁶⁷ This group will be composed of new believers and may include non-believers and church members. The invitation to join the group will be open to all adults.

one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ,"⁶⁸ new believers will attend worship services and other church events while they are a part of the meetings in which they are experiencing the story. Part of the process will be helping the new believer to understand that the Christian community is vital to his spiritual growth and his life as a Christian. Learning partners can introduce the new believer to others in the congregation.

In addition, new believers are coming into a local church that has its own identity that has developed through its history and traditions. It will be important to spend some time sharing the local church's story with the new believers. Older church members could share the church's history (maybe even on a 'church history night' open to the whole congregation). The interaction of long-time members with new believers will build personal relationships between them.

This chapter has proposed a way in which the governing body of the church can learn to move from being a management group to being a group that exercises spiritual leadership. This process involves monthly meetings apart from the monthly business meetings for the leaders to build relationships and to grow spiritually. We stressed the importance of not forcing new believers into a group and the importance of learning the Gospel story in Christian community.

Rather than proposing a program that every church must follow, I gave an example of a process to enable the local church to work with the Holy Spirit in the transformation of new believers. I followed the example by setting out elements that a local church can use in designing its own process. The goal of the process that a local church will design is to allow the spiritual leaders of the church to work with the Holy Spirit in the way that fits its people, its history, and its community. In this way

⁶⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 28.

the process will be flexible and adaptable, able to change to meet the needs of growing people in a changing world.

Conclusion

In September 2003, after I had begun this project, I had a dream. In the dream I was going to participate in a race. Everyone who was going to be in the race the next morning was staying overnight together in a large room. We were all connecting ourselves together with ropes and clips. Someone had to show me the correct way to connect the clips to the ropes. It was going to be really hot during the race and I looked at what other people had to take with them—towels, snacks, water. I didn't have anything, including a hat or sunglasses, or water. So I decided to drop out of the race. I left the room and didn't race. I decided to start getting ready for the next race.

The Apostle Paul likens the Christian life to a race in Gal. 5:7, 2 Tim. 4:7, and Acts 20:24, as does Hebrews 12:1: "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." In the church, all believers are connected together, not with ropes and clips, but by the Holy Spirit. All believers in the church need to have the spiritual equipment with which to run the race. Even one unequipped or poorly equipped person can hold the rest of the people back. Everyone may fail to complete the race.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we run together as the church in the race that is our life in Christ. We are called to live our lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we allow ourselves to be transformed in to the likeness of Jesus. When we begin the race as new believers, we begin what is to be a lifetime process of transformation. The race, the journey, is not run by one alone, but by all those who are joined together in the community that we call the church. The community provides support, encouragement, and admonition, and mediates the Gospel story.

The community under the Holy Spirit forms us into the likeness of Jesus Christ even as the community is being formed into a living witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

All too often the local church loses sight of the finish line—transformation by the Holy Spirit of individuals and of the church into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Programs replace process. Flexibility gives way to rigidity. The church becomes inwardly oriented—a fort existing to defend itself against a hostile world.

In this dissertation, we have examined a way for the local church to let go of the fort mentality. We have determined that the spiritual growth of new believers is expected. New believers are to grow in community with other believers. We explored the new science and proposed six concepts that a local church can use in designing a process.

We considered four models that the church has used in the past to enable the spiritual growth of new believers. In the catechetical method of Augustine and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius we saw that relationships and creativity are not the province of the new science, but have been used since the church's early history.

We then suggested how a local church can use the concepts from the new science to design a spiritual-growth process to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers. I proposed that the transformation of the church as a whole could begin by having meetings for the church board to facilitate relationships between board members, to help the board members to grow in their own spiritual lives, and to become a spiritual board capable of discernment. I suggested the importance of integrating new believers into the life of the local church by allowing them to participate in congregational life in their own time. I emphasized the importance of teaching new believers the Gospel story as a way of entering into relationship with God and with other believers. I then gave an example of what how such a process might be designed. The particular process designed by a local church must be continually assessed by the discernment of spiritually mature leaders and adjusted

as the Holy Spirit directs. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the expectation and excitement of spiritual growth will become a part of the culture of the local church.

A process of discipleship in the church that is based on the new science of chaos theory, quantum theory, and complexity theory can restore creativity and flexibility to the local church. Individuals live in a rapidly changing world, a world that is hostile and frightening to the unprepared. As the local church frees itself to be a part of the dynamic movement of life, it is able help new believers develop skills that will enable them to live in the world in confidence—the confidence of those who live close to God and who are being continually transformed by the Holy Spirit. The journey of faith that we travel, connected by the Holy Spirit, becomes a journey of joy and hope.

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