Introduction

Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

Leadership is a nerve-racking and exhausting business. Each new day, leaders face fresh challenges and yet more decisions, making it difficult to maintain momentum. Once leaders begin to tire or stall, they are in danger of becoming obstacles or diversionaries. If this is true under the most routine conditions, it is even more the case when the surrounding culture is in turbulent transition. Today, there is abundant evidence that such cultural change is rapidly occurring on a global scale, particularly throughout the developed nations and in cities that are worldwide centers of technological innovation.

For many institutions this sea change in culture has precipitated a crisis in leadership. Most of the leaders who have made it to the top of hierarchical institutions arrived there after decades of faithful service. During those decades, they developed insights and skills based on their accumulated experience. But now these leaders have emerged only to discover that the conditions under which they must operate are significantly different from those they have previously worked under. They are not only unnervingly unfamiliar but at times incomprehensible, having changed beyond all recognition. The ministry training I received over forty years ago was for a world that now no longer exists, and even at the time it was undergoing radical change. Consequently, the major challenge for leaders is not only the acquisition of

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new insights and skills but also unlearning what they already know. Today's leaders need the courage and ability to risk their false sense of confidence and to surrender their predetermined, "wired" responses, and outdated and inaccurate mental maps.

For the vast majority of leaders this is extremely hard. Hence, training has become a major industry—one that seeks to address two key questions. First, how can leaders now in place best be retrained so that they understand the global trends that affect them? Second, how can a new generation of leaders best be identified, resourced and eventually empowered to use their insights and entrepreneurial skills? Warren Bennis asks, "Where will the next generation of leaders come from?"[1] This is the question that must be on the mind of leaders in every institution, whether business, education, health care, military, government or—the concern addressed in the following pages—the church.

While this book is concerned with leadership in the church, the overall issue of leadership must be placed in a much wider context so church leaders understand that the turmoil they face is not confined to organized (or increasingly disorganized) religion. Rather, the cultural tumult is a pervasive one. It is not merely the consequence of the church's marginalization in the West. Neither is it due primarily to dwindling numbers or overstretched resources. It arises from the fact that the church faces cultural shifts of seismic proportions. Many of the changes occurring all around us are no longer predictable and incremental, but unforeseeable and chaos-producing.

Churches that fail to read and accurately interpret the signs of the times risk a bleak future. Throughout Europe and Australasia, this has been evident for some time. There, we have witnessed the steady weakening and near collapse of denominational structures—structures designed for a very different kind of world. Now, however, this cultural change is having as profound an affect on traditional North American denominations. Granted, this trend is more advanced in Canada than in the United States, the latter being still an anomaly in the Western world in terms of the numerical strength of its churchgoing population. But the United States is not immune.

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Few people would dispute the fact that the churchgoing population has been in decline during the past three or four decades. The only debate is regarding the actual percentage of the population that attends a worship service on an average week. The pollsters put this figure at between 39 and 43 percent, whereas those who base their estimates on attendance data reported by the churches put the figure at around 18 percent, with a figure of more than once-a-month attendance at around 25 percent. When these figures are broken down by region, the Midwest and South represent the highest figure, with the seaboard states of the Northeast and the Southwest registering the lowest church attendance.

Since the mid 1960s, North America has experienced four trends that when taken together point in the direction of the European and Australasian experience. The first trend has been the numerical decline of the major denominations. Those traditional denominations that used to be called the "mainline" are now "sideline."[2] Second, in keeping with their European counterparts, North American churches are losing their under-thirty-fives at an alarming rate. Third, as a result of dwindling congregations and higher operating costs, an increasing number of churches are struggling to keep their doors open. Finally, there are fewer and fewer seminary-trained leaders for those traditional denominations that struggle to replace aging clergy who are approaching or are past retirement age.

In the United States the serious nature of the situation is masked by a religious entrepreneurship that has brought into being a significant number of megachurches and spawned a church-planting movement that has recorralled a percentage of those who had left congregations to find their own way in life. The success of these initiatives, however, does not represent new growth for the most part. Instead, it is built on the redistribution of the existing churchgoing population. Furthermore, they have not made an impact to the extent that they have been able to reverse the downward trend.

Unlike the conditions of decline in the churchgoing population that prevail in other Western countries, the churchgoing population in the United States is in flux. With the rapid expansion of the suburbs after World War II,

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evangelical attention and church-planting efforts followed "white flight" from the cities to the suburbs. This in turn left behind elderly and poor whites to struggle to maintain their urban churches. These older inner-city neighborhoods were also home to vibrant African American congregations that were eventually joined by storefront churches established by the fresh waves of immigrants from Central and South America, Asia (especially South Korea), and sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these new congregations rented and later purchased the church buildings of those congregations that had either left the cities or whose numbers had dwindled almost to the point of extinction.

The negative church trends in the United States have also been masked by the phenomenon of returning baby boomers. In a movement that gathered momentum in the 1980s and the early 1990s, boomers who had abandoned the church in large numbers during the era of Vietnam and Watergate began their return. For many of these boomers, church took on fresh meaning after they married and started their own families. Moreover, it is estimated that 80 percent of these returning boomers selected a church of a different tradition from that in which they were raised. In fact, many were no longer influenced by the denominational label of a church, being attracted instead by its seeker-friendly ethos and the quality and range of its programs that addressed their felt needs.

This consumer-focused approach to ministry successfully attracted crowds, but it has failed for the most part to transform lives or construct significant personal relationships that provide encouragement, spiritual growth, accountability and avenues for Christian ministry. The old adage "easy come, easy go" has proven very true in terms of many churchgoers, especially the boomer returnees. Many wander from church to church, seeking fresh religious stimuli, entertainment and diversion. The United States may have a vibrant religious marketplace compared to the rest of the Western world, but more and more people spend their time just shopping around, looking for diversion while avoiding commitment.[3]

On both sides of the Atlantic as well as across the southern Pacific, churches are losing their under-thirty-fives.[4] Many explanations are offered

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for this loss; the most common of them focus on either archaic styles of worship or preaching that ignores the everyday life of younger people and leaves the pressing issues of the day unaddressed, issues such as ecology, sexuality, quality of life, the Internet and virtual communities.

This book focuses on a frequently overlooked factor, the relationship between leadership and the loss of the under-thirty-fives. Younger adults are walking away from those institutions characterized by a culture of control and a style of delegation that is considered disempowering—the prevailing leadership style of those who are over forty (whether they are boomers or the two previous generations, often called the "silents" and "builders"). Their concept of leadership and management most commonly follows the acronym PLOC (Plan, Lead, Organize and Control). That older style of leadership might have worked—more or less—in a cultural context where information was restricted and privileged, circumstances to a large degree were predictable and change was orderly. Those conditions no longer exist. As Gary Hemel asks in relation to the business world, "Are we learning as fast as the world is changing?"[5] In the midst of a cultural maelstrom, the church must not lull itself into a sense of false security on the misguided assumption that its leadership structures are firmly entrenched and biblically authenticated.

In addition to focusing on younger leaders, this book's particular concern is with those leaders who are in start-up congregations and new movements, or are working on an experimental basis within established churches with the liberty to develop new structures that are appropriate to the missional challenge. It would require a whole book to explore leadership issues within various traditions, be they Presbyterian, Episcopal, Congregational, or staff- and board-governed churches.

Our received understanding of the ministry of apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor-teacher might be far more culturally conditioned by the mindset of modernity than we realize. It is my contention that we need to reexamine these roles in light of first- *and* twenty-first-century contexts. How is it possible that the early church developed and deployed so many leaders within such a short span of time, thus multiplying local congregations

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throughout the Mediterranean world? How did the Christian movement of the first century expand so rapidly at a time when it was culturally marginalized, faced the challenges of pluralism and owned no real estate or training institutions?

In contrast to the first two centuries of the church, why has the twenty-first-century church been unable to produce leaders in sufficient numbers and caliber to revitalize existing congregations and birth new communities throughout the Western world? Furthermore, what can the churches of the Northern Hemisphere learn from those in the South that, despite their many problems, are sustaining incredible rates of growth? In the face of unprecedented missional opportunities and challenges, what should be the defining characteristics of the next generation of church leaders? And how can the churches in both the South and the North develop authentic followers of Jesus who will be faithful to the gospel in a rapidly changing world?

In attempting to address these issues, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to many younger leaders who are pointing to new ways of seeing and doing as well as to older mentors who have poured their wisdom into the lives of those who are so eager to learn on an ongoing basis. My oral sources are almost exclusively drawn from the church, while much of my reading outside of the Bible has been from thinkers in the business world. Indeed, similar questions are being addressed in the business world, both by Christian writers as well as by those searching for spiritual values in reaction to the moral confusion and spiritual wasteland that has been created by the secularization of Western societies.

I am all too aware that this is a work in progress. Considering the changes and chaos of this fleeting world, it cannot claim to be anything more. Furthermore, the "emerging church"—the phenomenon that has surfaced within some traditional denominations and has also taken the form of new networking movements—is recent and evolving. Some observers have concluded that it does not have sufficient cohesion to be designated a "movement" and is by definition decentered. Some prefer to speak of it more in terms of a "conversation." It represents a spectrum of initiatives that share some com-

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mon values and priorities, while displaying considerable differences.

I have refrained from identifying individuals in deference to the fact that so many of the younger leaders experience a high failure rate as they embark on steep learning curves while feeling their way around. To all those who are no doubt relieved to find that I did not name them, I want to express thanks both for their enthusiasm and their vulnerability. Both of these are refreshing and energizing traits.

I have written with two primary readers in mind. The first is those leaders whose worldview has been shaped by the presuppositions and challenges of modernity and who continue to understand ministry to the flock and evangelization from a Christendom mindset. Such leaders consist mainly, but by no means exclusively, of the over-forty generations. There are also many younger church leaders who share this worldview because of the influence of traditional understandings of "church" and the presuppositions on which their training for ministry were based. For these readers, with whom I most closely identify, I have attempted to provide some insights as to why emergent church leaders see things in a very different light and demonstrate contrasting leadership styles.

Second, this book is written as a word of encouragement from an older guy to younger leaders, especially to those who are plowing a lonely furrow and wonder whether their risk-taking and the misunderstanding they encounter are worth the effort. I also want to offer some cautions and point out some blind spots that I believe need to be identified for the future direction of the emerging church. In reality moderns and postmoderns need to be in conversation and in a listening mode because each has valuable insights to contribute. This is especially important at the present time when worldviews exist side by side to the extent that all ministry has become crosscultural. The critique we offer regarding our various understandings of the church must be deeply theological, yet from the standpoint of a missional and kingdom-embracing theology, rather than a Constantinian and Christendom ecclesiology. The particular focus of this book is on leadership issues as they relate to the breaking of the traditional maintenance mold in

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order to engage contemporary culture. In so doing I will offer a theological critique that applies to the approach of younger leaders within the emerging churches in their responses to the challenges posed by traditional understandings of church.

Finally, I write this book after forty years of ordained ministry in the Anglican church. Despite the many tensions and uncertainties at the present time, I would not exchange today's challenges and opportunities for any other period. The church in the West is emerging from the misplaced certainties of the Christendom era to become the church that the Lord intended—shaped by our call to trust Christ unswervingly, our willingness to follow him into an unknown immediate future and our desire to invite others to join us in the adventure of the spiritual journey in the steps of the One who calls us to follow him as "the way, the truth and the life."

OVERVIEW

In the opening chapter I redefine leadership in response to the current cultural context of rapid change, much of which is unpredictable. This requires leaders who are able to discern the signs of the times and to respond in prompt and appropriate ways. It presents a challenge to older leaders who must question their assumptions about leadership and adopt new attitudes and learn new skills. It also highlights the different assumptions and styles of leadership between those who look to established institutional models and those who are shaped by the broader cultural context. This divide is partly, but not exclusively, generational.

Chapter two argues that change in leadership roles and styles is not an option but an urgent necessity. The information age is characterized by ambiguity. On the one hand globalization highlights the megatrends affecting our world through economic and religious power blocks, resulting in a clash of civilizations. Another factor is the emergence of communication networks, some of which are controlled by centralized media channels such as CNN or Al Jazeera, while others are decentralized and unregulated, such as the Internet. On the one hand large institutions, such as multinational com-

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panies and the militaries of Western nations, wield enormous power. On the other hand, networks of terrorist cells grab global attention and inflict significant damage, and small companies each with a handful of employees create 80 percent of the new jobs in North America and Europe.

In relation to the growth of the church around the world, we see the emergence of megachurches in the global South as well as in the North, but also the proliferation of small fellowships of Christians meeting in homes, cafés, schools, community centers, pubs and bars, business offices, hotels, and in the open air. Whereas the "elephants" get most of the attention, the most significant growth may come from the multiplication of the "fleas." For the most part emerging church leaders represent the fleas rather than the elephants. This is not because of a remnant theology that justifies smallness as the inevitable result of faithfulness to the gospel; rather it reflects the conviction that the church must be structured in small, reproducible units consisting of people committed to engaging the broader culture.

Chapter three reexamines the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew's Gospel from the standpoint of the missional understanding of the church outlined in chapter two. It emphasizes the challenge that Commission presents to the contemporary church in terms of reordering its priorities to transform church members into disciples who are learning to walk with God on a daily basis. In so doing these churches are also equipping them to translate their witness into the life situations and languages where God has already strategically placed them. It represents a shift in perspective from *going* to church to *being* the church.

In chapter four I address the need for churches to move from a hierarchical and often highly controlling style of leadership to one that is far more decentralized and that encourages ground-level initiatives. It is a style represented by strong relationships and high accountability. Chapter five takes up a major implication of this change in style, emphasizing the need for team building, not only among the paid staff but among the volunteer leaders and throughout the membership. A congregation must not be considered a crowd of people but a federation of teams. While the concept of team build-

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ing is simple, its development and sustenance is complex.

Chapters six through eight focus on those leadership traits, activities and attitudes modeled by many younger leaders. The lists and profiles outlined in these chapters are not randomly generated but represent cohesive clusters shaped by the response of younger leaders to the missional challenge of a postmodern cultural context.

In many ways the younger leaders have a distinct advantage over older leaders because they are a product of the information age. It is the only cultural context they have ever known, whereas most older leaders—this author among them—have had to shed many of the assumptions of the past, learning from the example of younger leaders and listening to their explanations and interpretations of postmodernity.

At the same time the learning is not all one way. Older leaders have much to contribute and need to raise their valid concerns regarding the weak points and blind spots of younger leaders. Furthermore, many younger leaders have not had the benefit of missions training and may be so immersed in their cultural context that they are not able to provide a critique from within. Our contextualization of the gospel and of the church must be critical rather than naive, recognizing that every culture, whether modern or postmodern, includes good, neutral and destructive elements.

Chapter nine addresses the issue of the price tag on leadership. There is always a cost associated with the very nature of the gospel and the world's antipathy to the message of the cross. In the present cultural climate there are particular costs arising out of misunderstandings within the church, and new initiatives and alternative structures entail risk taking.

The final chapter then turns to the issue of how new leaders will be identified and equipped for ministry in the twenty-first century. It identifies a number of innovative approaches being developed in the United Kingdom, North America and Australia. It speaks to established leaders and seminaries about the responses they might want to consider and also encourages younger leaders to avail themselves of new opportunities for learning. Many are committed to lifelong learning and have developed interdisciplinary

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learning skills, but this needs to be expanded beyond a pick-and-choose learning style to include communal learning (virtual and face-to-face) and areas of study that they would not have selected on their own but that will expand their conceptual horizons and provide valuable insights.

It is always difficult to write from within a context of cultural transformation. Twenty-twenty vision is much easier with hindsight. But the changes taking place are so significant that we must not live in denial or downplay the signs of the times. If we succumb to these temptations, we will wake up one day to discover that we did far too little, much too late. And that won't be the first time in the long history of the church.