

## **QUESTION #1:**

### **What *strengths and weaknesses* does our historical theology hold for church multiplication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

#### **Contents**

1. DISCUSSION PRIMER:
  - a. Introductory Comments by Stan Granberg
  - b. "Reflections on the Strengths & Weaknesses of Our Heritage" by Leonard Allen
2. RESPONSES TO QUESTION #1 (FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS).
3. Q & A SESSION WITH LEONARD ALLEN & JOHN MARK:
  - a.

#### **Introductory comments by Stan Granberg:**

We're going to take a look at "our family" (Churches of Christ). Part of the reason new people are not coming and staying in our established churches is just that - They are *our* churches; they aren't *their* churches. We need to allow for some changes if our churches are also going to become *their* churches. With change come fears. One of the questions some of us find ourselves asking is, "How much do we need to change before we lose our identity as Church of Christ?" But perhaps the issue is not whether or not we will lose *our identity* as "Church of Christ," but whether or not we will be *identified with* Jesus Christ. As a primer for our discussion on Question #1, Leonard Allen is going to share some of his reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of our heritage (based on his recent book, Things Unseen).

#### **"Strengths and Weaknesses of Our Heritage" by Leonard Allen:**

##### **Strengths of our heritage:**

###### Summary:

- A. Robert Richardson's Principles
- B. Marks of the 'Believers' Stream

###### A. Robert Richardson's Principles

*Background:* Robert Richardson identified 3 main strengths of our movement (see below). A son-in-law of Alexander Campbell, Richardson critiqued Campbell's work and wrote a series of articles called "Reformation" to show the genius of Campbell's movement. (For anyone who is interested, Carson Reed has done a republication of these articles.) If you were to read Richardson's articles today, you would wonder what happened to this vision. Churches of Christ got overtaken by sectarianism. In this vision we see a foundation for this new church planting movement.

*Principles:* Robert Richardson identified 3 basic principles (strengths) of our movement:

1. *We drew a distinction between faith & opinion.*

- Even though we are a back-to-the-bible movement, we really can't say, "The Bible is our only creed" because when autonomous churches and individual Christians read the bible and interpret the bible for themselves, they inevitably will arrive at some differing conclusions, especially on peripheral matters. We must distinguish between the bible and the gospel.
- Richardson: "That alone which saves people can unite them." The bible never saved anyone. Faith in the good news did. Faith in this gospel ought to be the only test of orthodoxy.
- We're not united by the bible but by the gospel – the simple facts of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. So let the bible be our library, but let the gospel be our standard for orthodoxy. And let faith in the good news be our basis for unity.

2. *We drew a distinction between Christian faith & doctrinal knowledge.*

- Think of Christ as a person to get to know, rather than a doctrine to memorize. Jesus is not a doctrine; he is someone we get to know relationally.
- Knowing Christ is more than informational; it is transformational. As we know Christ better and better, our deepening relationship with him results in a transformed life.
- This is why early churches of Christ would accept transfers from Baptist churches and other faith groups. It wasn't their agreement on all doctrinal matters that provided the basis for their unity. Rather it was their common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

3. *Our "simple evangelical Christianity."*

B. Marks of the Believers Stream

In the US there have been three major streams of Christianity:

1. Catholics
2. Protestants
3. "Believers Church" (includes Churches of Christ).

This third stream is becoming more and more *relevant* in the U.S. because Christendom is over! Let's recover our Believers heritage because it meets the needs of Americans at a time when the church is becoming disestablished.

Two classical marks of the Protestant church:

- wherever the gospel is preached
- and wherever the sacraments are observed

Additional marks of the Believers churches:

- fire (for evangelism in the land?)
- suffering (persecution)
- mobility of the pilgrim (can move and go and adapt – we're used to wild adventures for the kingdom)
- an 'eschatological community' rooted in scripture (we have a sense of living in the end times and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in the world)
- a community that sees purpose as a martyr mission to the world
- a community determined to obey God rather than men
- living a transformed life by supernatural power of Jesus Christ
- a visible church (visible to the unchurched / lost)

This describes our heritage! This describes the early leaders of our movement!

### **Weaknesses of our heritage:**

#### **A. Transitioned from Christian Movement to Sect**

We struggle with the baggage of sectarian influence. We can't expect to see a church multiplication movement if we are sectarian.

#### **B. Transitioned from Eschatological View to Self-focused Complacency**

We've lost our sense of being an eschatological community, a people who are living in the end times. Complacent, we've become pubs that withdraw from the surrounding community and drown our sorrows together. We need an apocalyptic view. Apocalypse is a like arsenal on the church; we need to pray God will set us on fire again! By "eschatological community" we do not just mean we are a people waiting for the kingdom to come, but a community participating in the in-breaking of the kingdom in people's lives. With this view, we will wake up and be ready for adventure again!

#### **C. Present View of (and reliance upon) Holy Spirit**

We need to recover a *Trinitarian* doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We have a large barrier to this in our heritage. After Modernity, the challenge hasn't been in creating openness to spiritual reality - Postmoderns *are* open to this! Rather, our challenge today is in constraining it and focusing it and disciplining this "openness" so that believers' lives are conformed to the way of Jesus.

## Instructions

Now, using Leonard Allen's reflections as a primer for discussion, break out into small groups and share your own responses to **Question #1: What *strengths and weaknesses* does our historical theology hold for church multiplication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

## ANCILLARY QUESTIONS

### How does our historical theology support church multiplication?

- NO CREED – We don't have a creed or "statement of faith" to defend.
- UNITY – The longing for unity is deep in our roots. Our movement started in search of unity. (The trouble was in how we later defined unity, or in what we eventually accepted as a basis for unity.)
- CONCERNED ABOUT CHURCH HEALTH – We've always attempted to have a very *clear* understanding of the nature of the church. We are concerned about fulfilling Jesus' promise to build his church. We saw preaching of the gospel as the means, and a healthy church as the end. So we've been concerned about what that healthy church should look like. What is a church? "Buildings, budgets and bigshots." Where's Jesus? We can do church without Jesus. Something's wrong here. A church can something as simple as a family with Jesus at the center. Don't need any buildings, budgets or bigshots.
- NARRATIVE/RELATIONAL THEOLOGY – We are shifting back to relational/narrative theology. God is a living person, not a doctrine. God chose to reveal himself as personal and relational.
- AUTONOMY – Our autonomous structure (speaks to postmodern authenticity). We do not report to a headquarters. We do find freedom & flexibility in our restoration independence / autonomy. This autonomy gives us a pilgrim mobility ("light on our feet"; DNA of difference).
- PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS – We believe the real action is found in the local church. We believe in the ministry of laity. In a free church tradition (priesthood of all believers) there are seeds of freedom for the launching of new communities of faith
- JESUS – We believe Jesus is the only way. *Stan Granberg: "This is where postmoderns meet scandal at the cross."*
- OPPORTUNITY – In a nation where people are having strong reactions against denominationalism, we have the opportunity to be known as just Christians. Church as way of life.

- SUPPER & BAPTISM – Our practice of Lord's supper and baptism can serve as points of connection with other church traditions. We can use them as community concepts, rather than a means of including/excluding others.
- STONE INFLUENCE – The Barton Stone portion of our movement provides us with an emphasis on the Spirit, on purity, on passion. Let's tap this part of our history more!
- LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE – Elders of autonomous churches – translates easily into postmodern churches who welcome "spiritual guides" / "spiritual parents" (vs. denominational structures and the "pastor" model).
- CHURCH PLANTING HISTORY – We've been church planters in the past.
- ALLEGIANCE – Willingness and energy to think "outside the box" of accepted theological positions. Strong desire to obey God rather than men
- REGARD FOR SCRIPTURE – High view of scripture. Belief that gospel is core and that scripture leads us to the gospel. Our commitment to biblical practices – our "search for ancient things" – can become a "bridger" for unity. Our desire to "get back to the Bible" has become a weakness, but where there is weakness there is opportunity.
- COMMUNITY – Strong sense of brotherhood. Relational. Response to crisis.
- PASSION FOR LOST - A passion to see the kingdom of God spread – missionary impulse. Called by God to be a part of what He is doing. Sense of expectation.
- KINGDOM THEOLOGY - A sense that "this world is not our home." – kingdom theology.
- CARE FOR KIDS - emphasis on youth/children's ministry
- THEOLOGICAL DEPTH (reverence for scripture; academic arenas on practice; theological development; theology and ministry)
- THEOLOGICAL HEALTH (community DNA encourages belonging)
- VIEW OF CONVERSION - A transformed life. Beginning of a journey.
- TALK/ACT - healthy balance between "talk" and "act"
- SIMPLICITY – easy to communicate
- OUR STORY - We have a story with power (heritage). Others even are playing off of our restoration theme.

- FAITH-OPINION DISTINCTION – Faith = [basis for] unity. Opinion = liberty. [In] all things = charity.
- IDENTITY - Early identity was fluid.
- VIEW OF HOLY SPIRIT - Early doctrine of Holy Spirit was bible-based.
- VIEW OF SUFFERING - Once grew through suffering.
- APOCALYPTIC FIRE - Once had apocalyptic fire for evangelism
- LOGIC - Our rules of logic once were a good thing
- LEADERSHIP - Once had apostolic leadership
- PATTERNS - Establishing new patterns/traditions started out as a good thing.

### **How does our historical theology challenge or hinder church multiplication?**

So many of our strengths have become weaknesses:

- AUTONOMY - from freedom → to no accountability.
- IDENTITY - from fluid → to concretized.
- HOLY SPIRIT DOCTRINE - from bible-based → to no empowerment. Fear of the Spirit. Restrictive view of the HS. Lack of Trinitarian view of HS. Need to recapture some of the influence of Barton Stone.
- CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING – from fit → to misfits. Not that we must “go along” with culture (sometimes we must be counter-cultural), but we have lost touch with the changing “language” and worldviews of lost people in our post-Christian, postmodern culture.
- VIEW OF SUFFERING / SACRIFICE - from being a people who grow through suffering → to being a people who avoid suffering. “What are you willing to give up (practice, pet doctrines) to reach Bridgers, Busters?” In us there is a (mistaken) sense that to give up anything would be infidelity to God.
- LOSS OF APOCALYPTIC VIEW (from fire for evangelism → to closed doors to the world). Lost our “eschatological mindset” and stopped envisioning God working in the world today.
- APPRECIATION FOR RATIONALISM/LOGIC (translated church into corporate business). Campbell’s strength was allowing a rational means to becoming a Christian for those frustrated by revivalist path (exclusively) to God. But this

created churches full of people who intellectually assented to a set of arguments about Christ, but have not repented / grieved over their sin (historical and present phenomena).

- LEADERSHIP STYLE - from apostolic → to controlling leadership. We depend on our security – by control. Becomes a power struggle. Elders police doctrine rather than shepherd the flock. Takes away from the “priesthood of all believers” mentality; elders are not liberating movement of laity as ministers.
- PATTERN THEOLOGY - from establishing new patterns → to idolizing the traditions. Holding onto forms that no longer fulfill their functions. Formula approach (rather than a relational approach). E.g., our traditional ‘five true marks of the church’ don’t match up with the marks identified by Christ himself. They don’t even match up with the marks identified by Campbell himself, or the marks of the “Believers” church (see notes from Leonard Allen’s talk above).
- VIEW OF WOMEN
- DEPENDENCE ON HUMAN ABILITY – Focus on being right vs. being good. “Am I doing right?” – holds us back. Extreme attention to doctrinal minutia/detail – we think that if we’re wrong about any doctrinal point, this endangers our salvation. In the man vs. plan debate, the plan won out. Pragmatic mindset of “church growth” practitioners eliminates eschatology. No longer is the issue “God breaks in”. The focus is on “what we can do” to be successful and grow.
- VIEW OF SCRIPTURE / METHODS OF INTERPRETATION - Constitutional view of scripture (confused bible with gospel). We now see the flaws in our “pattern” hermeneutic (command, example, necessary inference) – where we had ‘arrived’ if we could just get the pattern right. Need to restore a narrative hermeneutic where we see ourselves as part of God’s ongoing story. We need to focus on finding principles and applications.
- LACK ADEQUATE LEADERSHIP TRAINING - elderships lack theological / pastoral training
- LACK OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION - church planting seen as avoidance
- VIEW OF CONVERSION/METHODS OF EVANGELISM – Using old frontier approach with 21<sup>st</sup> century postmoderns = ineffective. Our old love of the debate has done us in.
- OVERLY LEFT-BRAINED – Lack of “spiritual” emphasis (not simply cognitive, but experiential).

- DEFINITION OF WORSHIP – Went from defining worship as a way of life to what we do in assemblies.
- PAID MINISTER-LAITY DISTINCTION – “priesthood of all believers” is a good doctrine, but need more pragmatic.
- COMPARTMENTALIZING - dualistic separation of material and spiritual - localized the holy
- CHURCH-CENTERED THEOLOGY - defining our view of Christ through the church rather than defining the church through Christ
- ISOLATIONISM – views of independence (autonomy) that excludes interdependence. Need to transition from radical autonomy back to just autonomy.
- SECTARIANISM - Like unflexible parents who don't let their children do things differently than we did, we've drawn lines of fellowship with converts who “do church” differently than we do. We've limited too much who is in the brotherhood. We mistook union / uniformity with unity. Asked people to drop their “baggage” and accept ours. Policing the kingdom: “But who's in and who's out?” Calcification of doctrine and practice into sectarianism.
- NOT ENOUGH EMPHASIS ON TRANSFORMED LIFE – We've been so focused on getting people saved, less concern with invitation into transformed, kingdom living (begins now). Focus on arrival point rather than the trajectory of a Christian life – “life after baptism.”
- PASSION FOR LOST - Evangelism strong aspirational value, but weak as actual value. We've lost a sense of empathy for the Lost, urgency about them.
- STATUS QUO – Risk-taking attitude is missing. – Chaplaincy church unacquainted with eschatological orientation toward kingdom. We've had a passion for permanence (let's stay here awhile and enjoy this for ourselves a little while longer) rather than purpose (let's get out there and share what we've got with others). We need to be okay with the God-intended fluidity and temporary nature of “church” on earth.
- CLAIM OWNERSHIP - “We've worked for 100 years to create our church franchise, now people are trying to change it.” – this is a feeling that change registers in CofC.
- SEEKER-SENSITIVITY.
- CONTROLLING – We think centralization, not dispersion.

- INSTITUTIONALIZED – We became institutionalized (around our universities). Need to return from organizational to organic.
- LEADERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS – We raised the bar for who can lead (e.g., must have education). *One of the ironies is that our postmodern culture is calling us back to relational approaches (vs. programs), dispersion (vs. centralization), sacrifice/suffering (vs. self-preservation and upward mobility), service/outreach (vs. inward-focused, self-nurturing).*
- DISCIPLING FOCUS. Need to be more Christ-centered. We've focused on creating new converts to "Churches of Christ" rather than followers of Christ. Pointed people to church (ourselves) rather than Christ.
- CHURCH-CENTERED THEOLOGY. We need to move away from church-centered theology (focused inward on how we do church and maintain our distinctives) and move back to kingdom-centered theology (the idea that we participate in the kingdom, which is much larger than the church).
- UPWARD MOBILITY / SELF-PRESERVATION - We've relied on other sources (in addition to/in lieu of God) to be our security. Consequently, we've lost the desire/willingness to take risks for the well-being of outsiders and assumed a self-preservation approach for us insiders.
- INWARD-FOCUSED. It's very easy for us to think and talk about ourselves and to forget about the people who aren't here and need to be.
- COMPLACENCY - Loss of pilgrim mentality, hope of God's reality beyond this world.
- IGNORE HISTORY – Pretending 2000 years of church history doesn't exist.

### **What spiritual and historical resources are available to us to use for multiplication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

- INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT. Spirit is missionary dynamo of church, not just personal spiritual coach. – Trinitarian orientation
- PRAYER.
- OUR OPENNESS TO "MAKING NEW MISTAKES" - Need to abandon formulas and customary methods of planting and reach lost by whatever means fit time, place, target: "Whatever it takes!"
- RESTORE SENSE OF KINGDOM OF GOD. Need a reframed sense of "kingdom of God". It humbles us to realize the issue is not whether "we're the only ones". We are in process as a people. A reframed sense of the "kingdom of God" redefines our mission; it challenges our sectarian spirit. The kingdom is

dynamic, not creedal in nature. This is going to change us and take us away from flawed “church-centered” theology. Kingdom theology starts with the gospel of grace. The kingdom cuts through political lines. Postmodernism has caused us to relax the “boundaries” between “us” and “them” in denominational lines. It creates the burden in us and mission flows out of that. Starts with the church leadership – leaders must model this restoration of kingdom mindset.

### **How will I bring this into my preaching? How will I talk about this with my church leadership/elders?**

- Start textually. Go to the Word. Show them different conversion experiences in Gospels and Acts, for example, when talking about the varied ways of converting to Christ (modern vs. postmodern).

### **Reflections on our heritage by John Mark:**

Influenced by his father, Harding, became a pilgrim, moved his family away from their hometown in Texas to start and nurture new churches elsewhere. Harding was willing to take risks.

The eschatological vision of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God is the key concept we need to restore in our people.

Redefining what ‘eschatology’ is. Not about “Left Behind” series. Not so much the eschatology of the end times, but about the in-breaking of the kingdom, which begins now in our lives. The notion that the kingdom involves much more than “saving souls” but also a whole new way of living and breathing in the world. This renewed vision for the present can reshape hearts of our churches for church multiplication!

As you preach, how does your message on Christ reflect that “the future has become present?”

### **Q & A with Leonard Allen & John Mark: “What will these new churches of Christ look like?”**

We need new kinds of churches for a new kind of future. Churches with new DNA. What will these churches look like?

- Different view of church: Church as a way of life. Don’t need a building.
- Different view HS. Led by Spirit. Believe in fruit-producing, life-transforming Holy Spirit.
- Different view of Christ. Believe Christ literally is present when we come together in his name, when we come to the table for communion/LORD’S Supper. Present as witness to our baptisms. Present for our sermons.

- Four means of grace: (1) bible reading, (2) ?, (3) contributing to the poor, (4) prayer.
- Goal = unity, not uniformity.
- Need to revision worship as way of life.
- Need to revision worship assemblies as participating in the throne room of God as He is among us. Expect everyone to experience this differently (from member to member, from church to church).

**Concluding Thoughts by Stan Granberg: "How do we view conversion in a post-denomination, post-Christian era?"**

- Campbell de-emotionalized the conversion process (intellectual assent vs. need an emotional experience of guilt and repentance).
- Let's keep intellectual part and restore emotional part to conversion - allow and expect emotion (grief, tears, etc.).
- In modern era we did conversion as individualistic experience. Let's recover the communal habits and practices that shape and socialize us into the kingdom of God (baptism, the Supper, etc.).
- Moderns must Believe to Belong. Postmoderns must Belong to Believe.
- Modern Process of Becoming a Follower of Jesus: Information → Faith → Conversion → Community vs. Postmodern Process of Becoming a Follower of Jesus: Community → Faith → Salvation → (and every now and then they want) Information. Moderns got "stuck" at Information. That was a funnel they had to go through first. Postmoderns are getting stuck at Community. This is a funnel they must go through first, as a way to try out Christianity to see if it answers the questions of their life. For them, this causes "The Flip" (where they go from thinking, "Hey this is working and things are great in my life" to realizing, "Hey, this is Jesus working in my life. I have a whole new reality!") Community helps them receive something they didn't have before. They had the physical relationship, now they have the spiritual relationship, too.
- For example, lost people can be part of community for three years preparing for baptism.
- Use different language to refer to the lost. View lost differently, better.

**We struggle with the question, "Does God work in our lives?"**

**Maybe the question ought to be, "Am I involved in what God is doing?"**