

### Unit 3: The First Wave Interpreted Worldwide Lecture: Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*

Ralph Neighbour had been working on a modern expression of New Testament Christianity since 1969; his brilliant adaptation of the cell discipleship system for evangelism is a blend of Yoido with his experiences as an evangelist and church planter.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of Bill Beckham's *The Second Reformation* seems to be to develop a more general, basic understanding of the cell movement in the context of church history and theology.<sup>2</sup> Three concepts from Beckham's book are very helpful to me.

#### **The Faith Community and the Two-Winged Church**

Beckham writes that he shares this parable of the "two-winged church" in all of his workshops:

*The Creator once created a church with two wings: one wing was for large group celebration, the other wing was for small group community. Using both wings, the church could soar high into the heavens, entering into His presence and do His will over all the earth.*

*After a few hundred years of flying across the earth, the Two-Winged Church began to question the need for the small group wing. The jealous, wicked serpent who had no wings, loudly applauded this idea. Over the years, the small group wing became weaker and weaker from lack of exercise until it virtually had no strength at all. The Two-Winged church that had soared high in the heavens was now for all practical purposes one-winged.*

*The Creator of the church was very sad. He knew the Two-Winged design had allowed the church to soar into His presence and do His bidding. Now with only one wing, just lifting off of the ground required tremendous energy and effort. And if the church did manage to become airborne, it was prone to fly in circles, lose its sense of direction, and not fly very far from its take off point. Spending more and more time in the safety and comfort of its habitat, it grew contented with an earth bound existence.*

*From time to time, the church dreamed of flying into the presence of the Creator, and doing His work over all the earth. But now, the strong large group wing controlled every movement of the church and doomed it to an earth-bound existence.*

*In compassion, the Creator finally stretched forth his hand and reshaped His church so it could use both wings. Once again the Creator possessed a church that could fly into His presence and soar high over all the earth, fulfilling His purposes and plans.<sup>3</sup>*

Beckham's image of the two winged church stresses the need for balance between the dual aspects of the church. This twofold image of the church is common.<sup>4</sup> Craig Miller speaks of the "two

---

<sup>1</sup>Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 97-109.

<sup>2</sup>Another useful resource, frequently quoting Beckham, is Joel Comiskey, *History of the Cell Movement: A Ph.D. Tutorial Presented to Dr. Paul Pierson*; the entire tutorial (including bibliographical resources for notes) is available at <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/tutorials/cellHistory-1.html>.

<sup>3</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1995), 25-26.

<sup>4</sup>One element is *teleological* while the other element is *stable & cyclical*. In Natural Church Development, it is referred to as bipolarity, with dynamic and static poles. The human body acts with muscle (dynamic) and bone (static); both are alive. Senge's *Limits to Growth* systems archetype consists a *reinforcing process* interacting with a *balancing process*. The diffusion of innovations adopter framework can be divided into a *visionary minority* consisting of innovators and early adopters separated by a *chasm* from the *pragmatic majority* consisting of middle

wings” in a faith community as a discipleship system connected to a worship service.<sup>5</sup>

**In my thinking we can expand this simple twofold model to be a complete system describing the local church.** One wing is the *discipleship system*, which is a teleological process of change with the goal of maturing the faithful. A healthy discipleship system begins with God’s work with the lost in prevenient grace, moves a person through the landmark experience of justifying grace, and forward in God’s work to mature the faithful in sanctifying grace. As a process, a healthy discipleship system consists of clear, precise steps toward a clear, precise goal. The progress of individuals through each of the steps in the process can be measured. In a discipleship system, God utilizes people to help other people grow in faith, move through maturation stages and then make their own disciples just as adults in nature form partnerships to produce children and raise them to become parents. In a discipleship system, converts learn behavior obedient to the commands of Christ, ultimately including the command to make disciples.<sup>6</sup> Discipleship systems are relational, ephemeral, and usually involve linking people together in small groups and/or networks, often undergirded by training subsystems known in cell churches as *equipping tracks*. They are *reinforcing processes* of change.

The other wing is the *worship system* of the church, which is undergirded and supported by *administrative subsystems*. These subsystems provide for the needs of the institutional church: buildings, property, finance, personnel, leadership development, governance and management. **The end result of a functioning worship system is literally a temple where worship takes place; all of the elements of a traditional and institutional church will fit into this “one wing.”** Worship systems cycle without much change; they are primarily interested in the ongoing, smooth function of current homeostasis. The Worship system is a *balancing process* that preserves stability, comfort and reduces anxiety.<sup>7</sup>

It is rare for the worship system and the discipleship system to be in balance. Normally one will gain a priority and the other will be neglected. When worship has a priority over the discipleship system, then proclamation or preaching will be perceived as the primary means of evangelism. The role of proclamation has been prioritized over the discipleship system in the Church in the centuries since Constantine. Conditions on the American frontier allowed for a great evangelical success through proclamation with minimal investment in a quality discipleship system; those conditions no longer exist.<sup>8</sup> Modern conditions require a balance between worship and discipleship systems.

In the traditional church, the community is centralized and located in the large group of people gathered for worship; in the cell church, the community decentralized and is found in each cell. Like

---

adopters, late adopters and laggards.

<sup>5</sup>Craig Miller, *NextChurch.Now*, 6; see also 50-51 and the Lecture on Craig Miller from Unit 1.

<sup>6</sup>More information on this definition of the church as a two fold system can be found in *Chapter Two: Discipleship Systems* at [www.disciplewalk.com/resources](http://www.disciplewalk.com/resources).

<sup>7</sup>For an illustration, see the visual parable at [http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable\\_shell\\_3.html](http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable_shell_3.html).

<sup>8</sup>More information on how traditional church systems resist change can be found in *Chapter One: Systemic Problems* at [www.disciplewalk.com/resources](http://www.disciplewalk.com/resources).

cells in a body, each cell is differentiated, all cooperate together to function as the “body of Christ.”

Beckham’s two winged church becomes the widespread model known in the cell church world as the “cell/celebration.” The celebration is for the worship of God; the cell is for community. The administrative functions of program and governance are often left unaddressed in the cell/celebration terminology.

In what is known as the “pure cell” church, Yoido’s theme of microprogramming and microgovernance is stretched such that all of the functions of the church are to be carried out by the cells. There are no committees and no programs, just cells fulfilling their ministry to the body as a whole. Cells both mature disciples and take on a ministry to the church as a group responsibility. Most institutional churches found this too great a change in paradigm and either rejected cells or attempted some sort of compromise to blend the cell model with the institutional church.

In your understanding of the church, what exactly is the “faith community?” The congregation gathered for a worship service in the temple? Or where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is there?

### **The Discipleship System and Beckham’s “Eddies”**

Beckham, growing up in the American south, likes to quote a Henry G. Bosch story about a customer noticing the absence of a slow moving store clerk named Eddie:

“Where’s Eddie? Is he sick?”

“Nope,” came the reply. “He ain’t workin’ here no more.”

“Do you have anyone in mind for the vacancy?” inquired the customer.

“Nope! Eddie didn’t leave no vacancy!”

There are quite a few “Eddies” in most churches today. They leave, and no one even notices. Why? First, because there is no real sense of the Body of Christ in which members are involved in a functioning manner. Second, many, by their own decision, have chosen to sit on the church bench on the sidelines of the action.<sup>9</sup>

Beckham points out that the percentage of “Eddies” in most churches is upwards of 80%. They participate in worship and little else. They are passive consumers of pastoral care, unable to care for themselves spiritually, and demanding that the entire church revolve around caring for their dependency needs.<sup>10</sup> This burns out those who are willing to serve and the church turns away from mission and evangelism to maintenance - the maintenance of spiritual infants. The following long quote by Beckham is the clearest definition I know of what is wrong with the church today:

Eddie’s contract with the traditional church is to be pampered, to receive ministry and to be entertained. In exchange, he will be counted in the numbers and will give an offering from time to time to support the system. Consumer Christians represent 80% of church members who are supported and ministered to by the other 20% who produce.

---

<sup>9</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, 41. *My apologies to anyone named Eddie!*

<sup>10</sup>The actual estimated percentage is 83% of worship attenders. For an illustration, see the visual parable at [http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable Not being fed.html](http://www.disciplewalk.com/parable_Not_being_fed.html).

This means that Eddie is anything but a neutral factor in the ministry of the church. In fact, he probably represents its most serious debilitating factor. Eddie is a major consumer in the church itself, requiring many producing Christians to care for his needs. Consumer Christians neutralize the productivity of the 20% of mature members who expend most of their time and energy ministering to Eddie, Mrs. Eddie and all their Little Eddies. . . .

When all the Eddies sit down on church pews, you can almost hear the sucking sound as they draw ministry to themselves. How many producing Christians would you estimate are required to maintain the kind of program that will attract Eddie and keep him happy in the traditional church? Whatever the number, it is high maintenance and low return on the time, effort and money, because Eddie seldom contributes in a positive way to either the edification of the church or the evangelism of the world.

Eddie may leave if he finds another church he feels meets more of his needs. Eddie will gravitate toward the strongest ministry pull and the most guaranteed benefits. Eddie can always find spiritual sounding reasons to justify his migration to greener pastures. "We are concerned for the spiritual welfare of our family. This new church has such a wonderful program for our children." Or, "Their style of worship is so exciting and moving. We want to worship God like that." Or, "I am fed by the wonderful peaching of that pastor. He is such a spiritual man of God." Who can question Eddie's motives when he gives such spiritual sounding reasons?

When Eddie leaves, he and his type "leave no vacancy" in the real ministry or work of the church. They just leave an empty spot on a pew on Sunday morning, a little less change in the offering place and one less member to have to pamper and please. Church leaders then must go out looking for another Eddie or two to replace the ones lost. What is going on here?

Churches of all sizes are held hostage by consumer Eddies who are the prime target audience for most twentieth century churches. Indeed, some of the most popular church growth strategies of the past several decades are built around consumer Christians in one way or another. Clever marketing schemes try to attract and hold the Eddies floating around in a self-centered society.

Why has the church agreed to allow its most immature members to dictate the ministry focus of the church? Why does the church tolerate manipulation - practically blackmail - from those members who contribute the least to the work of the church?

Eddies has his hook into the one-winged church because he presence is the measure of success in one-winged church circles. . . . And Eddie will not come if we do not ministry to him and give him what he wants.

The traditional system needs Eddies to fill a pew, to be counted in the numbers on Sunday, to financially support the construction of new buildings and the addition of new staff "ministers." All of these hooks are necessary to attract more consumer Eddies, who can fill more pews, which creates a need for new and better buildings to attract more Eddies, which means bigger buildings and on and on the cycle goes. Eddie is the driving force behind the "noses and nickels" game of the traditional church.<sup>11</sup>

The task of the discipleship system is to cause spiritual infants to grow up through stages of maturity to become spiritual parents and grandparents. When developmental needs for nurture and safety are met, spiritual infants begin to developmentally mature. When cells function as nuclear families and cell leaders function as spiritual parents, this nurture is delivered and spiritual infants grow up.

### **The Healthy Core Group and Beckham's Base Congregation**

Jesus had a very simple system to deal with Eddies: he asked them to "Follow Me" and then he left. Those whose commitment level extended to the willingness to walk several miles to remain with him were disciples; all the rest were simply left behind. Jesus continually abandoned people who needed him:

*And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to*

---

<sup>11</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, 44-46. Family systems theory suggests that churched Eddies also triangulate in order to control their access to the nurture they need; their desire to control the source of nurture for their dependency is the covert source of most church conflict.

*speak, because they knew him.*

*And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you."*

*And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns . . ." And he went . . .*

(Mark 1:33-39)

Jesus' mission was to make and mature disciples, not to meet needs. The easiest way to separate a spiritual infant from a disciple is to request some effort or work to be made. Requiring any form of obedience (Matthew 7:21-23), self-denial or cross carrying (Matthew 16:24-25) is usually sufficient to separate the sheep from the goats. Or you can just move around and see who follows you, as Jesus did.

The Great Commission of Matthew defines and prioritizes evangelism through a discipleship system; in Mark and elsewhere the emphasis is upon proclamation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preaches one sermon and three thousand converts result (Acts 2:41); pastors have sought to reduplicate these results with one sermon for centuries without success. The number of converts at Pentecost and thousands more in the days that follow are more the result of the discipleship system which Jesus modeled and taught for three years prior to the cross than Peter's sermon. If enough wood is stacked properly, a single match can start a great fire. Jesus spent three years stacking the wood in preparation for the church of Acts. While the disciples continued to practice the discipleship system of Jesus, the first priority was to light the fires Jesus had already prepared throughout Israel by preaching the resurrection.<sup>12</sup> Jesus said, "I will build my church," and demonstrated the necessary methods over three years of teaching. One sermon in a Billy Graham revival is the very last act in a very long process of preparation for that moment.

The discipleship system is the highest priority in third world cell churches. Cell churches believe, as Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). The harvest is ready; what is lacking are the laborers willing and prepared to labor. The discipleship system of the cell church produces these laborers in great number, and they bring a large harvest of persons into the cell church. The cell network is able to receive these converts and nurture them individually. Worship plays an important role, but it does not overpower the work of the discipleship system in prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace.

In planting a cell church, Beckham argues that a healthy core group is built through stages of size, from 2-3 to 12 to 70 to 120 "core disciples" who are ready to faithfully labor in God's harvest.<sup>13</sup> The discipleship system of Jesus balanced two factors that are frequently out of balance in modern churches. Jesus cooperated with God in prevenient grace and prepared thousands throughout Israel for conversion after Pentecost. He also cooperated with God in sanctifying grace and prepared 120 core leaders as those who would be able to teach "them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew

---

<sup>12</sup>Every community throughout Israel had a few who had experienced miracles, more who had seen them, some who had spent some time following Jesus, and many who had heard him teach. After the day of resurrection, proclamation would be enough to crystallize this proto-network of prechristians into a functioning local church. Discipleship systems work with God in prevenient grace to prepare people for a crystallizing moment of justifying grace.

<sup>13</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, 135-199.

28:20a). The end result of prevenient grace is a disciple; the end result of sanctifying grace is not a better disciple but a disciple maker. Disciple makers can teach new disciples to obey Jesus as Lord as well as know Jesus as Savior. Jesus developed a base congregation that was well trained to do everything necessary for the church of Acts 2-6. They had practiced these exact same skills for three years as they followed Him.

The church of fifteen thousand or more of Acts 2- 6 rests upon the solid foundation of a *base congregation* of 120 persons gathered in prayer in the upper room in Acts 1. As Beckham notes:

Today Christ builds the same kind of church He planted in the first century. When the base congregation finally comes together everything necessary to be the Body of Christ is in place. Christ has not called us to build a church of thousand, but to let Him form His base congregation of 120 around us. Inherent within one base congregation of 120 to 200 *upper room* Christians is the essential infrastructure to be a church of a thousand or tens of thousands. No other structure is required. Simply multiplying the mechanics and dynamics of that congregational unit can result in unlimited growth.<sup>14</sup>

Beckham then definitively proves that Yoido's transition to cell ministry was accomplished through his trained, disciplined, obedient base congregation made up of his deaconesses under the leadership of his co-pastor, Jashil Choi.<sup>15</sup> The functional, healthy core group of 200 women - less than 10% of his 2400 attenders - was a critical mass sufficient to begin the transition of the whole church to home cell groups, and then onward to 700,000 members. According to diffusion of innovations theory, a period of rapid adoption known as the S-shaped diffusion curve "takes off" at about 10-25% adoption, when interpersonal networks become activated so that a critical mass of adopters begins using an innovation."<sup>16</sup> Once a critical mass is achieved, large-scale, rapid adoption of the innovation is inevitable. Failure to transition is often due to the failure to build a healthy core group as a base congregation.

Don't try to change your Eddies; they would rather destroy the church than change their ways. Instead, Beckham advises building up a healthy core group functioning as a base congregation. Practice and perfect all necessary skills within the base congregation until all problems are solved and all systems function smoothly. Get every innovation right and running smoothly in the base congregation first and then expand.

*Who are the 2-3 committed leaders with whom you would begin your base congregation?*

*Who are the twelve or more disciples within your current church that you would ask to go with you to plant a new church?*

---

<sup>14</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, 201.

<sup>15</sup>Bill Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, 201-203. The same sort of base congregation was present in the transition of Bethany World Prayer Center, which will be described in Unit 4.

<sup>16</sup>Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995), 12.