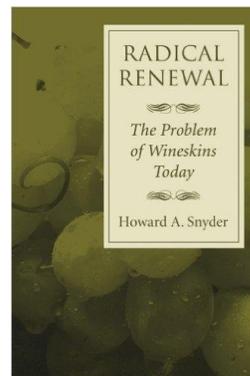


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Radical renewal – the problem of wineskins today

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Notes Alison Morgan June 02



God is always a God of newness – both OT and NT speak all the time of new things

Ps 40.3 new song

Is 42.9 former things have come to pass, new things I now declare

Is 43.19 I am about to do a new thing

Is 65.17 new heavens and new earth 2 Peter 3.13

Ez 11.19 a new spirit within them

Heb 10.20 new and living way

Mt 26.28 new covenant

Rev 21.5 making all things new

6 new movements today:

- Base Christian communities in Latin America
- House church movement
- Cell church movement
- Meta-church movement, esp US
- Prayer movement, esp Korea and N America
- Third wave of pentecostal-charismatic movement

A TIME FOR NEW WINE

1. *The impossible cataclysm*

'It is hard to escape the conclusion that one of the greatest roadblocks to the gospel of Jesus Christ today is the institutional church', p 23. It talks to itself in a corner about how to be relevant and usually comes up with a version of if you can't beat them, join them – presenting a 'theology' of political/social causes so hopelessly tied to passing cultural fads that its demise precedes that of its promoters. Meanwhile, everyone out there is talking about *experiences* and *relationships*; they don't want a theology at all. We could present Christ, not an institution/theology/program. But we don't. Most suggestions for renewal are either heretical (scrap gospel for something more 'relevant') or not radical enough. Most programs for renewal from evangelical authors fall into second category; they don't tackle the institutionalism. How about selling all church buildings, pastors get secular jobs, people meet in one another's homes – it would all grow.

2. *World on the brink*

World is on the brink of chaos. It is secularised, urbanised – and superstitious, anxious, lonely. It has returned in several respects to the spirit of the C1st Roman world; and so it may be strategic for the effective proclamation of the gospel. Parallels:

- Essentially urban world
- Unparalleled peace, stability, political unity
- Worldwide spread of one predominant culture and language
- International travel, communication, cultural interchange
- Pervasive social change; feeling that humanity shares a common destiny
- Widespread religious and philosophical ferment: practical atheism resulting from reaction against traditional religion and its gods; rise of new, intensely emotional religions and resurgence of some older faiths; rise of an irrational mysticism and an emphasis on experience rather than reason; general theological confusion and quest for new directions (rising disbelief in traditional gods)
- Moral degeneration

Are also contrasts: we are post, not pre-Christian. But renewing capacity of Christianity means often when the visible institutional church was dying, the Christian faith was being reborn in new movements. Some signs that this is happening.

: new fact of computer-electronics revolution – many react against it by turning to irrationalism and mysticism

: we are truly global

3. *The gospel to the poor*

OT requires justice to the poor. Jesus also said his ministry was to the poor. He believed the poor were more ready and able to understand and accept his gospel, eg Mt 11.25-26 (opposite of what we think today). He directed the gospel to the poor and recommended showing partiality to the poor. Implications:

- We should place emphasis on the poor
- The priority among the poor is evangelism; nothing we can do for them is more relevant than the gospel itself. Experience shows they are receptive.
- Christian responsibility towards the poor does not end with evangelism. religious movements are born among the poor, then succeeding generations climb the socio-economic ladder, leaving the poor behind.

The need is not for expensive, large-scale programs to carry the gospel to the poor, but for ordinary committed Christians to live and work among them and form cells of Christian witness which multiply to transform the community for Christ. Ministry among the poor is not expensive if based on biblical principles.

Why can't we do it – because we have a distorted view of the church

A LOOK AT OLD WINESKINS

4. Churches, temples and tabernacles

Jesus is the fulfilment of sacrifice, priesthood and tabernacle. The great temptation of the organized church has been to reinstate these three elements among God's people: to turn community into an institution.

The tabernacle is fulfilled in the body of Christ; God dwells in the hearts of his people. Refs.

5. Are church buildings superfluous?

None till c 200AD; so they aren't essential for numerical growth or spiritual depth. Church buildings are:

- A witness to our immobility
- A witness to our inflexibility
- A witness to our lack of fellowship
- A witness to our pride (they must be beautiful and well appointed)
- A witness to our class divisions (external appearance reveals income bracket)

Body church (OK)

Organic network of small groups bound together by large-group corporate worship experiences; no building needed

Cathedral church

Building determines church's program and lifestyle; in danger of spiritual death

Tabernacle church (OK)

Church has functional building, multipurpose, to be used or not as occasion demands

Phantom church

Nebulous, individualistic; may look like a body church but no real community

How do you tell where your church fits? It isn't a church if it

- spends more on buildings than outreach
- holds all its gatherings in the church building
- puts maintenance and construction before mission and evangelism
- refuses to use its building for other than 'sacred' functions
- measures spirituality by number of people present within the 4 walls

6. Must pastors be superstars?

If the pastor is a superstar then the church is an audience not a body. Superstars run big success churches – but there are thousands of churches, only hundreds of superstars; not enough to go round. Church of God cannot run on superstars any more than a horse can run on jet fuel.

BIBLICAL MATERIAL FOR NEW WINESKINS

7. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit

True Christian fellowship – *koinonia* – is the HS's gift to the church. It is sadly lacking in much of the institutional church today. Don't find dropped masks, honesty and community beyond the human in many churches. Church members look contented; but are crying out for someone to listen.

The fellowship of the HS is the true description of the church.

It is not superficial social fellowship; or some mystical communion that exists without ref to the structure of the church (you can't have fellowship with another believer who is not present).

It is that fellowship among believers which the HS gives. It is the fellowship of Christ with his disciples

It is the fellowship of the early church as recorded in Acts

It is the earthly counterpart and foretaste of the eternal fellowship of heaven.

It is analogous to the unity, fellowship and communion between Christ and the Father.

Koinonia has implications for church structure – the church must meet together in ways that permit and encourage communication among the members – which won't be the traditional Sunday service. Prayer is part of it (fellowship must be vertical as well as horizontal). The church must have structures which are sufficiently informal and intimate to permit the freedom of the Spirit. Traditional corporate worship must be supplemented with informal opportunities for koinonia. Direct Bible study must take place; God speaks through the scriptures and the scriptures testify to Christ.

le: small group fellowships.

8. The people of God

Church is part of God's plan to prepare and call a special people – a chosen, pilgrim, covenant, witnessing, holy people. Means it should meet together in such a way as to express its peoplehood – ie as large gathering.

9. The mind of Christ

Is the human mind just 'a slow-clock rate modified digital machine, with multiple distinguishable parallel processing, all working in salt water' (Philip Morrison)? NT word for mind is nearer to heart in OT. When NT says mind it means the totality of the human person as a rational, moral and spiritual being.

Image of Christ in us:

- spontaneity
- individuality
- moral sense
- self-consciousness
- volition

Church must be structured to recognise uniqueness and value of human personality; flexible and varied; built around spiritual gifts.

10. The ecology of the church

Purpose of the church: to be a sign, symbol and forerunner of the kingdom of God. functions: worship, community, witness. Worship – the curtains of time and space are thrown back, and we see the realm of the Spirit; worshipping in spirit and in truth gives us a window on eternity

Community – Acts 2, Eph 4

Witness – possible only from a living Christian community; elements are evangelism, service, justice

Fellowship of the HS = discipline, sanctification, spiritual gifts

11. The place of spiritual gifts

Unbiblical tendencies which quench the working of the HS:

1. denying/discrediting spiritual gifts
2. over-individualising spiritual gifts
3. confusing spiritual gifts and native abilities (neither synonymous nor opposites)
4. exaggerating some gifts and dismissing others
5. divorcing spiritual gifts from the cross

12. The small group as basic structure

Small group of 8-12 people meeting informally in homes is the most effective structure for the communication of the gospel in today's hi-tech society. Offers the best hope for the discovery and use of spiritual gifts and for renewal in church and society. Small group was the basic unit of the church's life for the first 2 centuries. Advantages:

1. flexibility
2. mobility
3. inclusive
4. personal
5. can grow by division
6. can be effective means of evangelism
7. requires minimum of professional leadership

8. adaptable to the institutional church

CHURCH STRUCTURE IN SPACE AND TIME

13. Church and culture

Views of church;

- biblical
- institutional
- mystical

Biblical view sees church in historical perspective; in charismatic rather than institutional terms; as community of God's people

Guidelines for church structure:

- Leadership should be based on exercise of spiritual gifts
- The life and ministry of the church should be built on large-group and small-group structures
- Clear distinction should be made between church and parachurch structures
- Churches should be part of an organic network

14. A lesson from history

John Wesley. Elements:

- a clear proclamation of personal salvation through Jesus Christ
- a consistent emphasis on the Spirit-filled life
- an active and involved social consciousness

He did not confine self to institutional church. He created new structures for koinonia. He preached the gospel to the poor.

15. A look to the future

Church will increasingly have to choose between a charismatic and an institutional/bureaucratic model for its life.

Anything in the church that cannot be maintained without consistent pressure on people to be involved shouldn't be happening.

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