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Document File
"Dan Fuller on
Cell - Group
Churches & TEE"

Dear Ralph:

As Bill Bright has regaled me (twice in the past two years) about the millions of converts gained through the showing of the Jesus Film, I have felt uneasy wondering about how these converts were going to be shepherded. I know Bill lays great emphasis on Dawson Trotman's concept of "follow up." He has ten booklets detailing the ten steps a person should take after receiving Christ. The final emphasis is for a new convert to unite with a Bible-believing local church. Invite that person to your own church if he or she resides nearby. If the new convert resides at some distance, "Through your pastor or other reliable contacts, locate a good church in your new friend's locale and encourage him to attend. Drop the pastor of that church a note encouraging him to invite your friend to the next Sunday's activities."¹

My problem, however, is that I lack confidence that what Ralph W. Neighbor, Jr., calls the P.B.D. church (Program Base Design)² is really suited to nurture a new convert. I am not sure, for instance, that if I turned a new convert over to LACC that that church is set up to disciple someone. As you have pointed out, things were better along this line when we had Christian Endeavour. That was a program specifically aimed at developing leaders and disciples. In it we were not just taught, or preached at, but coached.

The problem increases greatly for me when I think of the large number of converts Bright's Jesus film is producing in third world countries. A concrete example of this confronted me last Friday when a former student, now the pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Covina, brought a native of Ghana, the Rev. Matthew Asante (also a former student), to my office for a two-hour conference. Tom Messinger, the pastor, serves on a Board of Trustees for whom Samuel Asante is the c.e.o. Asante's task in Ghana is to organize and administer the theological education for many of the Kwa people, 8 million of whom speak Twi. He says that over the past 5 years 1.2 million Kwa have been converted by the Jesus film even shown on national TV since it is one of the few films having a Twi sound track. He is to administer a theological seminary already started and going in a suburb of Accra on the sea coast on the periphery of the southern third of the country where 60% of the converts

¹ Bill Bright, Witnessing Without Fear (San Bernardino: Here's Life, 1987), p. 147).

² This term comes from Ralph W. Neighbor, Jr., Where Do We Go From Here? (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), et passim. "The P.B.D. concept doesn't build people on the foundation of Christ; it builds only programs. The assumption is that the programs are necessary to build the people, but it just doesn't achieve this goal! The first thing a P.B.D. church looks for are Specialists to direct the different programs of the church. Even the smallest group will seek for a Pastor-Specialist who can come and preach, teach, counsel, raise the budget, administer its spending, win the lost, and effectively manage the church schedule. He is not particularly seen as an 'equipper of the sints of the work of ministry'; instead, he is the Minister. . . . [In larger churches] the Specialists [E.g., Senior Minister, Executive Minister, Minister of Visitation, of Evangelism, of Education, of Music, of Children, of Youth, of Singles, of Young Adults, of Median Adults, of Older Adults, and the Business Manager] involve no more than 15% of the total members as working volunteers. The balance of the members are expected to attend the many functions [programs] which have been arranged for them. In larger churches, this may involve as many as one hundred meetings a month!" (pp. 47-49).

live. The other 40% live 200 miles to the north in the center part of Ghana. And he has this American organization to help in the support of this seminary. Its literature stresses the great need of providing pastors for these 1.2 million new converts.

A big reason for his thinking that education in a localized seminary will do the job is that Benson Idahosa, a very successful Nigerian evangelist for the past 25 years, founded a 3 yr. school for his numerous converts. Many of these are pastoring churches and shepherding his converts. They are also being evangelistic in planting and pastoring new churches. Maybe Matthew Asante will achieve some success in shepherding Bill Bright's 1.2 million converts in the same way as this Nigerian evangelist has done it. But having been influenced by your concept of TEE and having seen in Operation World how widely it is used all over the world, I have come to realize what an effective means that can be for providing pastors on the mission field and here at home too.

But when I mentioned the possibility of his resorting to TEE to provide pastors for the 1.2 million, I found out he had never heard of it. I pressed him on how difficult it must be to bring in Ghanians to live in a hostel in a suburb of Accra for up to 3 months time. He admitted that only 5% of the pastors are fully supported by local congregations, and of course he wants money from the US to provide scholarships for the remaining 95%. I also raised the problem of how dangerous it sometimes is to move a person away from his community and family to an urban area and then expect that person to go back easily to the more primitive rural area. I was about to give him my copy of your Theological Education by Extension but refrained remembering Wesley's policy not to give literature away. So Tom Messenger and Samuel went up to the USCWM bookstore to try to purchase a copy or an update version of this theory of theological education. But yesterday Roberta said the book was long out of print and this morning Samuel told me over the phone that he had tried to get it Friday but could not. But he said he would welcome any opportunity he had to learn about it. We need your counsel on how he should train shepherds for the 1.2 million. (I will relent and give him my copy of your book if worst comes to worst. But if there were a market for it and you wanted to do it, FTS copy services could easily make a reprint edition from my copy and your publishing house could market it. But I am sure you know far more about how to do that were it desirable.)

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Now what follows is the write-up I prepared in advance to give to Samuel Asante. It is based on a concept of church structure and leadership education that is closely linked with what Carl George, the c.e.o. of the Fuller Evangelistic Association ("The Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth" CEFI) calls the "meta-church,"³ and others, like R. W. Neighbor Jr. and Yonggi Cho call the "cell-group church." Last March I decided no longer to be a tenured professor at Fuller Sem. after 8/31/93. Wanting much to go on being as useful as I could it seemed that God was leading me to see what could be done in promoting the cell-group church structure concept.

NOTE. Probably the biggest influence in my decision in this regard comes from my son, Steve. He has been engaged in planting cell groups in south San Jose for 3 years. He is 37 and has ministered in five P.B.D. churches. In the fourth, a BGC home mission church in Redding, he was senior senior. At that time he began having charismatic experiences and left to be an assistant to John McClure in the Newport

³Carl F. George, Prepare Your Church for the Future (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Revell, 1991)

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Vineyard for five years. Then God gave him dreams. In several he saw sign posts pointing to San Jose. God told him to become a real estate broker to support himself and family, and "I will give you ample commissions." God also led him to proceed in church planting by developing cell groups made up of new Christians and not discontents sponged from neighboring churches. All this came to pass, albeit on a numerically small scale. His cell group of younger people is about to divide into two groups led by his two most apt and matured disciples. Then he will continue to work on the cell group of older folk (several are parents of the younger folk who came out of curiosity aroused by what was happening to their children) and seek to build it up beyond the boundary line (determined by social psychology, C. George, p. 125) of 10 to 12 people so it will divide and have its own leader. That group will have an apprentice leader being trained to take over when that group grows to ten or twelve and then redivides. This concept came to him last December when he read Carl George's book, and it was strengthened by reading two more books by Ralph Neighbor, Jr. He came down for the yearly Fellowship of the Arc meeting last June and presented this concept of church organization to the 18 or so pastors, one of whom was John Piper. A transcript of the 4-hour long discussion between Steve, and Piper and other P.B.D. pastors will soon be ready. It brings forth many of the issues to be faced in both kinds of church organizations. Understandably P.B.D. pastors are leery of the cell-group model for church organization. But an ABC pastor in San Luis Obispo decided he would lay the ground work to shift his church over to this model. He is in his 3rd church and is very experienced. Last evening I listened to the tape of how he introduced the "great change" that was about to occur in that church. He called up overjoyed that the people were so enthusiastic about restructuring so they could reach out to the unchurched of that central California area and think in terms of being much more effective in evangelistic outreach. Tom Messinger now wants to do the same at Covina. (end of note)

In reading the Global Prayer Digest I keep wondering how we would get churches established in so many people groups. I know you are not wedded to any particular church structure and for you the idea of having churches in some of these groups established on the cell-group model has probably been obvious for some time. As I see it the beauty of the cell-group model for some of the 11,000 unreached peoples is that we need only disciple one bi-lingual (but preferably more than one) from a target people. Then send that person back to that people and regard him or her both as the pastor for the first cell-group (church) there and as the theological seminary for training other cell-group leaders. Then having churches in all these people groups does not seem nearly so daunting. More of how I am thinking on how this could work comes out in what follows which is a slightly revised version of what I wrote for Matthew Asante two days ago.

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1. The mandate for frequent (weekly) cell-group meetings of no more than 12 people is found in Hebrews 10:24-25. Here we are commanded to frequently meet to stir up one another to love and good works and to encourage one another. This can be done only in groups up to 12 people.

--See also Heb. 3:12-13's command to rebuke evidence in another of unbelief. How can we fulfill it apart from 12-member cell groups?

2. Other advantages of a cell-group church structure: How else. . .

--will we be able to keep on discipling those becoming Christians according to the command of Matt. 28:19-20?

--will we be members of a body who really care for the other and are hurt by the hurts of others? (Beyond 12 people we experience "overload.")

*Where in
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--will we get the multitude of counselors in whom there is wisdom (Prov. 1:5),

--will we realize the ways in which we irritate each other and learn to change our ways?

--will we get the continued encouragement to fight the fight of faith? (see below for understanding this as the only fight of the Christian)

--will keep on pursuing in the sense of "persecuting" (that is, gaining mastery over it) holiness--Heb. 12:15--without sharing our defeats and triumphs and learning from each other? (Each of us must pursue holiness with all zeal or else we will not see God--an unacceptable alternative.)

The cell-group church structure offers a very promising prospect for planting churches in the remaining 11,000 unreached people groups of earth. We cannot plant program-oriented churches (the structure accepted since the Edict of Constantine in 313 A.D. because it's too hard to keep people regularly attending a worship service made impersonal by having at least several dozen people jammed silently together once a week. (But several cell groups should meet together for a larger celebration-type meeting from time to time.)

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Furthermore, it is impossible to train ministers to run newly founded churches in unreached people groups if ministerial training must follow the present consensus curriculum of first-world theological seminaries. Founding a seminary for them with a faculty for all the specialties to be taught is impossible. *Amen* TEE teachers are not always in position. It's also unthinkable that we will ever be able to support enough full-time missionaries to take the ten to fifteen years of time necessary to learn the language and customs of just one people group so they can evangelize it or become TEE teachers for it. But the cell-group model helps solve these problems. For example, we come to a new people group in the next valley in Irian Jaya. Language unknown to any outsider. Culture unknown. But---there is usually somebody in a new people group that is bi-lingual. Now, if we can get hold of this person, or better, several like him or her, and have a discipler who speaks the second, non mother-tongue language, then these bi-lingual people from the target people can be taken through a course in basic discipleship. After completing this course some of these who give evidence of having "learned of Jesus" (Matt. 11:28-30) and having his mind (I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5-8) should be urged to return to their people-group and each begin to disciple others (conversion must involve being discipled, for only disciples are to be baptized--Matt. 28:19-20).. (The non-leader types can be members of the first cell group.) For further training of disciplined leaders we could do worse than follow John Wesley's example with his lay preachers and circuit riders. He gave each of these about fifteen books. Today such books might be (1) Latourette's church history, (2) Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, (3) The Life of David Brainerd, (4) Unity of the Bible (Dan Fuller wrote this to meet his need to figure out a way to teach someone the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26) who had made a decision to "receive Christ" and wanted to "learn the whole Bible" in a limited amount of time), (5) Schaff's Creeds of Christendom, (6) Ralph Winter (ed.) Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, (7) E. F. Harrison, Introduction to the New Testament, (8) E. K. Harrison Introduction to the OT, (9) Howard Taylor The Life of Hudson Taylor, and 10-15 remain open for candidates. The cell-group leaders should also receive, as did Wesley's lay preachers, a batch of about 75 basic sermons on the radicals of the Christian message. (Wesley saw point in trying to teach them homiletics and how to develop their own messages.)

If these contiguous people groups have, at hand, the resources for TEE (Theological Education by Extension), then the cell-group leaders should surely take advantage of the training offered in this way. Dr. Ralph Winter's pioneering book on TEE sets forth some reasons why ordinary seminary training

is even counter-productive to effective ministry. Some could even learn Greek, inductive Bible study, pedagogy, and other subjects that make a person a more effective leader. But we must always think it terms of the bare minimum for Christian leaders, if we want to get the world evangelized ASAP.

To conclude the intro: Discipling another person involves only teaching a person how to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12 cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1 Pet. 5:8-9. It is well to key all discipling off Galatians 2:20 where Paul said his day-to-day life lived by faith (confidence, hope) in the Son of God who loved him so much he gave himself up for him. Paul's testimony in Galatians 2:20 about how he kept on believing in Jesus on a day-to-day basis helps one understand how faith in Jesus removes all heart thirst. He said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I [now] live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (NIV). (The "now" in brackets exists explicitly in the original.) There are three implications in this quotation's last sentence that show how believing in Jesus satisfies all heart thirst.

1. The Jesus who died for Paul had now risen from the dead, and was so in contact with Paul on a day-to-day basis that he (Paul) was certain that Jesus was directing him throughout each day. As a result Paul characterized his whole life as being conducted in a confidence based on Jesus' great love for him.

2. Jesus' death was the gauge of the intensity of his benevolent love for Paul (and others). So Paul's confidence in Jesus Christ, which governed his life on a day-to-day basis, gave him complete peace regarding his future both in the short and long term.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane before he was arrested and crucified makes the intensity of his love for those believing on him unmistakably clear. So terrible was the suffering Jesus was about to endure on the cross as God poured out on him the wrath that believers should have suffered for their sins that as he came to the garden of Gethsemane he said to his disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (Matt. 26:36). Going a little farther to be by himself "... he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matt. 26:39). Finding his disciples sleeping rather than praying for him he went back and prayed a second time, "My Father, if it is not possible for this this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Then checking on his disciples again and finding them sleeping "for sorrow" (resorting to an escapism) about what was to befall Jesus (Lk. 22:45), "he left them and went away the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'" (Matt. 26:43-46). No incident connected with Jesus death on the cross could possibly convey the intensity of Jesus' benevolent love for lost humanity more than this account of the agony he endured just before the process began that climaxed with his death on the cross the next day.

3. This intensity of Jesus' love, which upheld Paul's confidence in Jesus' continual guidance and supervision of his life, summoned into play all Jesus' knowledge and wisdom (his omniscience) and power (omnipotence) as God in order that he might always service Paul and others in the most benevolently possible way (see significance of chrestos in Rom. 11:20-23, comes from chrao which is to "be of service for, useful to"-- God working for us, Isa. 64:4; Psa. 123:2; Matt. 6:24.. It must surely be evident to everyone that no heart thirst in the form of fear about the future could remain in one who was thus trusting in Christ. Furthermore, there could be no heart thirst in the form of wondering whether or not one was devoting one's life, with its

individuality and unique aspects, in the most worthwhile way and for the greatest benefit for all others in the world at the present and in the future. At this point it is well to cite two remarkable passages that emphasize the greatness and intensity of God's benevolent love to us.

Even though Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords yet his whole purpose is to service us. This Jesus made clear in Luke 22:25-27:

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors[!] But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at table? But I am among you as one who serves.

The rhetorical questions about who is greater that Jesus poses alert us to the basic matter that will arise in considering how to be Jesus' disciples, and that thesis is that the one who serves is greater than we are who served. (Surely the doctor who treats is greater than the patient who is treated, and the lawyer who advises greater the client because doctors and lawyers provide services dearly needed by those whom they serve.

Another remarkable passage showing God's intense benevolent toward us is Jeremiah 32:40-41: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them. . . . I will rejoice in doing them good . . . with all my heart and soul." A joy into which all of God's heart and soul enters as he does us good represents a love as ultimate as that in Galatians 2:20 where Jesus loved us enough to go to the cross. God summons his whole being into the task of doing us good. The confidence that the living God is putting his whole heart into loving us leaves no room for for any heart thirst. Persevering in such a confidence in the sense of returning to it after various trials and backslidings have created great heart thirst is what the present, continuous tense used to speak of "believing in Jesus" in John's Gospel should be understood to imply. Hopefully this helps overcome the triteness of telling people that to be saved they should "believe in Jesus as their personal Savior.

--How doctrine of Trinity increases our desire for Jesus, U. of B. Ch. 11

Now since quenching heart thirst and hunger is so desirable, and since it depends on responding positively to the guidance of the resurrected, living Jesus who loves us so much (guidance given through Bible and through leading of Holy Spirit, and also in all the ways that wisdom is attained, which will be discussed a few sessions hence, it should be clear that faith in Jesus, except perhaps when one is close to death like the thief on the cross, must always produce works, as Gal. 5:6 says. Such works are not the works in which people boast. Those works would be the works which people do to serve God, as though we were the employees and he was the employer client.

Someone has said that what we hope in we worship, and what we worship we serve. So when we teach "believing in Jesus" as banking our hope for a joyous future exclusively on Jesus Christ" we are teaching "the obedience of faith for all nations" (Rom. 1:5). According to Galatians 5:6 "faith is working it self out in love" (lit. trans.). This means that faith has to work in love, and so there is no contradiction between Paul and James, 2:24. (Calvin, however, falsely affirmed that the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) had nothing to do with sanctification but only with believing one Jesus' as dying for one's sins.--see his comment on Rom. 1:5. in his commentary.)

It must be understood that all of God's commandments are on the analogy of a doctor's prescription rather than a job description, Acts 17:26. The Sabbath was made for man and not vice versa.

Now all this should end up, as I am now thinking, by aiming toward the qualifications for being elders and deacons/deaconesses found in the pastoral epistles. Those being disciplined have to learn how to explain each one of those qualifications by (1) saying them in other words (2) and giving specific examples of how they would figure in certain situations--Adler's 2 tests for knowing whether or not we understand something. So when you have people whose demeanor achieves the godliness of these elder-deacon qualifications, they are disciplined. They are able to be elders, which means they are now to go and disciple others. Course ended. Now open the gate for the next batch of recruits coming into boot camp.

See how some of the qualifications for being elders/deacons/deaconesses all depend on believing Jesus in the Gal. 2:20 way. We take two qualifications from the list in Titus 2:1ff.

1. Temperate If from believing in Jesus (Gal. 2:20) you have joy both for now and the future, then you will not over indulge in eating or sleeping and become enslaved to the addictions so common today. In this way you will honor God's goodness and benevolent love in giving you your marvelous body. Therefore you will keep it in peak running order. (It would be inconsistent to believe in Jesus continued love for you in the future and not take care of the love he has shown you in the body you have.) This means , e.g., overcoming obesity, exercising regularly, and maintaining dental hygiene. Being satisfied and thrilled by Jesus' continuous love one (Gal. 2:20) will not fritter away time in watching sports (unless some time for recreation is needed), or TV or radio programs, or reading novels.

2. Serious. If one believes in the great benevolent plans God has for one (Jer. 29:11; Gal. 2:20), then one will strive always to be engaged in doing the best things for oneself and for the rest of humanity. Therefore one will never "goof off" but will always "seek first the kingdom of God" (cf. Aletta Jacobca and the revival among the missionaries in Korea in 1939. See also Wesley's rules for his lay preachers and for his class meeting members in the 8th volume of his complete works.

By training people for these qualifications of leaders, we will be getting some who can lead the next cell that divides and so will have pastors and a theological seminary.

*Yours in Christ
Dan Fuller*