

The Exiling of the APE's

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By Tim Catchim and Alan Hirsch© 2012

The basic trouble [with the modern church] is that the proposed cure has such a striking similarity to the disease

–Elton Trueblood

In a revolutionary era... you need to learn to think and act like a revolutionary. People in revolutions who don't act that way have a particular name: victims.

– Joshua Ramo Cooper

We can all recall the almost ubiquitous stories about a renegade hero who was once famous and brilliant, who has now found himself rejected, scorned, and cast aside—think Jack Bauer in the 24 series here if you need an example. Mocked by his peers, alienated from all but a few friends, given to alcohol binges, and generally feeling very sorry for himself, the protagonist is all alone and given up as a loser. However, the plot soon reveals that the very organization and people that rejected him (usually the police, the special ops unit in the military, or in Bauer's case CTU) realize that the fallen hero is the only person who can resolve a particular problem. Our hero, now freshly deputized, enters into the fray and ends up saving the day.

The reason why this theme is so prolific in the countless stories, poems, and movies is that it is mythic. And it is mythic because it points to some real, lived, experience in human affairs. There is a wisdom deeply embedded into our myths that tell us that many of the answers we need will come in the form of radical outliers, people who exist on the margins of what is considered conventional. The myth-become-real involves the profound recognition that these exiled heroes are in some real sense what we really needed to resolve the issues we currently face—that the answer *does not come from within* the existing state of affairs, but rather from outside the ingrained understandings of what is considered normal and conventional. As in the many movies we see, the outlier does bring the much-needed dissonance into the status quo, a dissonance which jolts the system out of complacency, initiates a learning journey, and results in the eventual resolution of the problem at hand.

Whilst de-emphasizing the silver-bullet bravado side of the myth, we nonetheless think that this myth of the exiled hero is entirely applicable to the nature of our dilemma—the exiling of the APE's fits this narrative—and reflects our desperate need to re-embrace them in our own day. We need to re-embrace and re-integrate the ministries of the apostle, prophet, and the evangelist with those of the shepherd and teacher.

MONOPOLY ANYONE?

How did the shepherd-teacher model of leadership come to occupy such an exclusive place in the church's life? How could the other three vocations of apostle, prophet and evangelist drift so far from sight that they hardly even make it on the map, much less into our vocabulary and conversations about leadership? We believe that the answer to this question lies in the unique nature of the APEST itself and the outcomes when the system becomes dysfunctional. As we

have seen, each ministry type produces a certain ministry impact that together produces a holistic result. But the opposite is also true, when each ministry, taken by itself, divorced from the other ministries, it produces a dysfunctional, aberrant, result in the people of God.

So, for instance, the Shepherd and Teacher (ST) will tend to design more stable environments where people can learn to relate and grow in their understanding of the faith. However, as the learning and maturing are to be lifelong activities, communities led *primarily* by these ST's will lack urgency and will likely concentrate on issues relating to long-term sustainability. The net result will be to move inexorably towards a state of what living systems theorists call *equilibrium*.

The ST functions are ones that bring needed equilibrium into the system. And this is completely necessary for long-term sustainability—few can survive in chaos situations for too long. The problem however, arises when the ST functions become disengaged from the full APEST system. The result is that much needed balancing with disequilibrium producing ministries is undone. When this happens, the dialectical pressure is removed and equilibrium becomes a settled state...and when a living system is in *perfect* equilibrium it is effectively dead.

Jeffrey Goldstein in his insightful book *The Unshackled Organization* describes equilibrium as the state in which a system is at rest or not changing. At equilibrium an organization seeks to stay the same, simply repeating its habitual patterns and in a sense over relying on solutions that worked for it in the past. He notes that as a result “it is a condition of the lowest organization and complexity.” And because of the addiction to the stable state and to past approaches, the emergence of any new patterns of behavior in the system are experienced as opposition to the deeper, more dominant force of equilibrium.”¹

The truth is that organizations in this state are extremely difficult to change—even when their very survival is being threatened. This is because equilibrium, like any death, is experienced incrementally, as an encroachment, slowly creeping up on the unwitting subject. Humans are classic deniers of our own impending death...the same is precisely true for all human organizations. In fact, in many ways institutions are Babel-like attempts to perpetuate life and thus deny death.

And should the organization and its leadership perchance rouse from its death slumbers, alert to the danger, in most cases it would probably be too late to do anything about it. Is this not the sad pattern involved in almost every closure of a local church or the decline of entire denominations? The real problem here is assuming that the dying organization (along with the incumbent leadership that led it to that condition in the first place) were actually willing to pay the price for change, by the time it makes that decision it will likely lack the internal resources (both theological and ministerial) to do anything about it. All the generative resources needed would have been already invalidated and/or ejected from the organization long before. Therefore such organizations will lack the theological architecture, a deep-seated sense of apostolic urgency, or the leadership capacity to solve their own problems. If at all, these would have to be ‘imported’ from outside.

And just so that we are not being misunderstood here, we want to assert again that it's not that the ST variation of leadership *intends* to produce such stifling equilibrium. We fully believe that the vast majority of Christian leaders are sincere in their desire to serve God and his people in whatever way they can, and thankfully very few willfully intend to damage the church and its mission. What we *are* saying is that ST forms of ministry are simply not wired to produce *missional* movement— as community builders and wise philosophers it's not what they were

¹ The Unshackled Organization by Jeffrey Goldstein p. 14

designed to produce in the first place. Rather ST's provide the *integrative/operative* aspects of ministry, whereas the APE's furnish us with the more *generative/adaptive* forms.

This just underscores yet again that all ministries are intended by Jesus to be part of the broader, synergistic, interplay between various other ministry types. Each type contributes something that the others cannot. APEST represents an organic whole in which none are meant to operate independently of the other—we are called into a body function where there is significant diversity of ministry form and expression.

All this highlights the need for the reinstatement of the permanent revolution originally intended in Ephesians⁴. That it is permanent and inbuilt is highlighted in verses 7 & 11 where we learn that Jesus has placed, indeed *permanently* given (here expressed in two aorist indicatives of *didomi*), the intrinsic capacities to his people to keep them precisely from such a situation. Here is the algorithm of ecclesial maturity: the internal self-renewing system that we need to keep on the journey and to fulfill our tasks.

BACK TO THE DIALECTIC: TOWARDS SYNTHESIS

Living systems approaches rightly note that all living systems resist change and tend towards equilibrium. The status quo is called that for good reason, and it has a long history of, and an inbuilt capacity to, resist change. In other words, resistance to change is entrenched into the system caught in status quo. This means that when trying to stimulate change and activate mission, church leaders will need to be very prepared for some conflict. Churches that are used to equilibrium will resist being moved out of the somewhat predictable, safe routine they have settled into overtime.

Furthermore, we need to recognize that the very equilibrium itself is produced and maintained by the incumbent leadership that created that condition in the first place! Leaders are part of the system one way or another. And we must recognize that it is not easy for anyone to acknowledge culpability because it means taking responsibility for failure to grow and advance the cause. Pride, ego, paradigm blindness, and vested interests are not easily exposed. But we *can* trust the Holy Spirit, that he desires his church to grow, and we can trust that the deepest instincts of every Christian will resonate with the missional calling of God's people. These can, and must be awakened. And when they are, we can be sure it is a work of God's grace. However, if leaders and/or members of any organization is not willing to re-engage the missional Spirit and go where he leads us—and it *will* inevitably mean change—then it is highly doubtful whether the much needed adaptation can take place.

And so organizational dynamics, spiritual warfare, and plain human nature conspire to play their part in perpetuating the monopoly of the more maintenance driven forms of organization and leadership. As the collective representation of human concerns, organizations almost inevitably develop an uncanny capacity to actively resist change. Haven't we all heard that age-old bureaucratic refrain "we just don't do things like that around here!" The sad truth is that unless the necessary precautions are taken, over time all organizations tend to become more important than their founding mission. When this happens they will actively enforce conformity, codify behavior, and actively weed out dissent. In other words, they tend to equilibrium and resist disequilibrium.

It is because of this that innovators are seen as rebels, dissenters, and upstarts. They are almost always marginalized because their very existence and nature implies that things are not as they should, or could, be. In other words, the very act of innovation involves an implied critique. Any suggestion that there might be more to ministry than shepherding and teaching can invite the

full range of responses, ranging from more mild “unbiblical”, to suggesting that those proposing a broadening of the categories are ‘cultish’, or that the would-be apostles and prophets are simply power hungry people who are trying to lord it over the flock.

And there is no doubt that there have been APE type people who do fit any or all this descriptions. But demagoguery and power mongering are certainly not limited to the APE claimants. For instance, the Inquisition, surely the ugliest chapter in church history, was initiated and operated by ST's no less—all in the name of religious conformity and ideological control! The truth is *all* humans are susceptible to misuse of power and to wrong motives, and history amply indicates that the priestly classes who have monopolized leadership roles in the church up to this point have had more than their share of abusive power. In fact priestly types of abuse are possibly one of the worst because it violates people where they are most vulnerable (in their relation to God) and bears false witness to the Gospel. This is not about laying blame in either direction, but is a call to a much-needed self-awareness on the part of those defending the status quo.

This dismembering of the Body of Christ has done violence to the ministry of Christ through his church. More specifically, it has meant that the more generative forms of ministry, representing as they do the impulses that naturally drive us towards missional engagement, spiritual renewal, cultural revitalization, and ecclesial innovation, have been negated in that process. In many ways, this process has taken something of the adventure of missionality out of the venture of church. Rather than audaciously engaging the significant challenges that we face, we have become known as being an overly defensive religion, conservatively defending its ground and trying to hold on to its diminishing status in Western society.

We do well to remember at this point that it is a key task of Christian leadership to lead the church into God's purposes and future—it's a Kingdom of God affair. This involves significant risk and requires that we overcome our impulses for safety and security and to burrow down in fear and defensiveness.² The great commission is hardly a call to safety and equilibrium! And we should also remind ourselves that Jesus never promised that the church would be 'safe' but rather that he will be with them in their ordeal of witness. (John 16:33, 2Cor.1, Hebrews 11-12, 1Peter, etc). Surely we need to re-embrace the exiled ministries in order to creatively engage the challenges we face.

² Alan has written an entire text with Michael Frost that explores the role of adventure, courage, and risk in the church, mission, discipleship, and leadership. See Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, *The Faith of Leap*.